The New Criterion

May 1994

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. May 1994, Volume 12, Number 9. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Outside the United States, add $7 per year. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. Copyright © 1994 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, OH 44870. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date.

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Kate Shanley, 799 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. (212) 477-4905. Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan/Laurie Barton, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard with the Flexicon Composer from E-Type Design Associates, and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

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Notes & Comments: May 1994

"Viewer discretion is advised"

Good sense is one of the first casualties of decadence. We grow accustomed to the outrageous, innured to the repulsive. Unfortunately, this does not mean that what was outrageous and repulsive yesterday has suddenly become wholesome: on the contrary, it only means that our moral instincts have become blunted. Familiarity breeds indifference, which we countenance at the price of our diminishment. We see this process at work in many areas of contemporary life, perhaps nowhere more insistently than in the art world, where beauty and aesthetic achievement are routinely rejected for the sake of various forms of ideological activism. A few years ago, the country was galvanized by Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of a perverted homosexual underworld and Andres Serrano's blasphemous image of a crucifix submerged in his own urine. The art world rallied to champion these rebarbative objects—sometimes claiming the prerogatives of free speech, sometimes of sexual or religious adventuresomeness—and good sense promptly capitulated. Nowadays, when grisly sex, bodily effluvia, and pseudo-religiosity have become staples of chic artistic entrepreneurs everywhere, the Mapplethorpe–Serrano episode seems almost innocent. Then, at least, such performances were the rare exception. And many people—even many who defended such "art" on the grounds of free speech—privately conceded their distaste for the works themselves. Today, everything has changed. What was the exception is now commonplace, as museums and galleries across the country compete with each other to organize exhibitions and performances featuring ever more repellent images and behavior. Is this progress?

We had occasion to ask ourselves this recently when an article from *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* crossed our desk. The article described an event that took place this winter at the Walker Art Center, a once-serious museum in Minneapolis that has lately become a repository of the fake, the meretricious, and the trendy wherever it can be found—a kind of Whitney Museum of the Midwest. Here, in the words of the *Star Tribune*, is what museum-goers in Minneapolis got to see that night: an HIV-positive man "sliced an abstract design into the flesh of another man, mopped up his blood with towels and sent them winging above the audience on revolving clotheslines." This so-to-speak cutting-edge performance was presented in conjunction with the fifth-annual Minneapolis–St. Paul Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Film Festival. It also featured two female assistants who wove acupuncture needles through the shaved scalp of the performer—an L.A.-based "artist" named Ron Athey—pierced his arms with "about 30 hypodermic needles," and

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"allowed him to pierce their cheeks with slender steel spikes." Kathy Halbriech, the trendy director of the Walker, did not see the performance. But she confidently asserted that the event was "appropriate for the Walker to be sponsoring." One must, she cautioned, understand the performance "in the context of contemporary art and historical and religious precedent." *Religious* precedent? Well, yes. One official compared the performance to "the rituals of the church and the body and blood of Christ." A museum press release explained that Mr. Athey regards his body as his "canvas" and also observed that "when pierced and covered with his own blood [he] is evocative of St. Sebastian." The press release observed further that "medical paraphernalia and bondage and discipline toys and techniques are also used in the performance. Due to the nature of the material, viewer discretion is advised."

It can almost go without saying that this event was funded in part by taxpayers, courtesy of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. One museum spokeman insisted that only $150 had gone to support this particular performance. But this is disingenuous. According to *The Washington Post*, the museum received $104,000 last year from the NEA for its performance-art programs. (Over the last three years, the Walker has received more than $1 million from the NEA: your tax dollars at work.) The *Star Tribune* got hold of the story because distraught members of the audience—some of whom knocked over chairs to get out of the way of the bloody towels—complained to public health officials. Of course this showed a conspicuous lack of cool, for the fact that Mr. Athey is HIV-positive was part of the event's "charge." (It was not known whether Darryl Carlton, the man whom Mr. Athey cut, is also HIV-positive, though it was revealed that he regards mutilation of his body as "a cultural tradition.") Naturally, museum officials downplayed the potential health hazard: it was explained that the amount of blood spilt was "minimal" and quoted health officals agreed that it was extremely unlikely that anyone in the audience could contract AIDS from bloody towels zinging about overhead. Consoling, is it not?

Trilling vs. Trilling

It is a virtual certainty in American cultural life today that any official prize, award, or distinction that is established in the name of some recently deceased eminence will be conferred upon a living figure whose work is in every way hostile to the spirit of the person in whose name the honor has been created. We seem to know of no better way to "honor" the admired dead than to profane their memory by giving awards in their name to their political and intellectual enemies.

Thus, no sooner was the Lionel Trilling Book Award established by Columbia University two decades ago for the express purpose of "recognizing a new book by a faculty member that best exhibits the standards of the late Columbia professor's own work" (as the *Columbia University Record* recently put it) than its first recipient, in 1976, proved to be Professor Edward Said, a writer on literature and politics whose work stands in opposition to everything Lionel Trilling wrote on those subjects.

Now, to compound the offense, the Lionel Trilling Book Award has once again this year been conferred upon Professor Said for his latest work, *Culture and Imperialism*, which represents precisely the kind of ideological criticism that Lionel Trilling devoted a considerable part of his writing to opposing. We must therefore assume that the Columbia students who voted to confer this award upon Professor Said—for this is an award determined by a student committee—are either unacquainted with Trilling's writings or dedicated to discrediting the "standards" upheld in them.

As if this were not enough for one season, this year the same committee voted to give a

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"special" additional Trilling Award to Diana Trilling, the writer's widow, for her recently published memoir, *The Beginning of the Journey*. The Trilling Award to Mrs. Trilling is "special" in two respects. As originally conceived, the award was of course intended to go to a member of the Columbia faculty, but in order to allow Mrs. Trilling to qualify, the terms of the award have been revised to include members of what is now described as "the Columbia community."

The other sense in which the awarding of this honor to Mrs. Trilling is "special," however, is more grotesque, for *The Beginning of the Journey* is itself an extremely hostile and mean-spirited attack on the character and personality of the author's late husband. "I very much disliked the image of Lionel as someone immune to profanation," Mrs. Trilling wrote in her memoir. She therefore set out to unmask—or, as we now say, deconstruct—this despised "image" of Lionel Trilling as "a kind of moral exemplar" for his students. And since she is a writer of some talent, Mrs. Trilling succeeded only too well in sullying his memory.

That it should now be thought appropriate to honor this attack by conferring the Lionel Trilling Book Award upon its author is more than a distasteful paradox. It constitutes the endorsement of an indictment that has little to do with the great contribution that Lionel Trilling made to Columbia and even less to do with his own literary achievements. Least of all does Mrs. Trilling's indictment of her late husband's character have anything to do with meeting "standards" set in his own work. This is an award that disgraces Lionel Trilling's memory, and thus disgraces the institution that allowed it to be conferred.

Helen Wolff, 1906–1994

With the death of Helen Wolff, something precious has been lost to American publishing, and to the life of world literature in English. Mrs. Wolff, who died in March at the age of eighty-eight, was the last of that generation of European-born editors and publishers who fled their homelands in the years culminating in the Second World War and who later came to work in, or even to found, English-language book firms in the United States. These remarkable individuals brought to America not only the writers they had published overseas but also a command of European languages that enabled them to respond to the best non-English postwar writers with a quickness, a conviction, and an enthusiasm that few Americans could match. They also brought with them a European sense of publishing as something more than a mere business—as, indeed, a vocation—and this, at least in the case of Mrs. Wolff and her husband, Kurt Wolff, resulted in the loyalty of authors and booksellers and in hard-won financial success. The Wolffs' publishing philosophy, practiced in America for over half a century, was simple: stay small while thinking big, invest in writers rather than in individual books, take long views regarding profitability, and handle as many details as you can—from contracts to jacket blurbs to press releases—personally. A simple philosophy, perhaps, but one seldom imitated here, and with good reason: it cannot be practiced by the impatient, the greedy, or the unsure in matters of taste.

Mrs. Wolff, the daughter of a German electrical engineer and an Austro-Hungarian mother, was born Helen Mosel in Macedonia in 1906. "At home," she once told an interviewer, "we learned German, but I also spoke Turkish and Serbian," and to this she later added French, Italian, and English. She adored books from the time she could read, and always wanted to be involved in publishing. At the age of twenty-one, she went to Munich to apprentice at Kurt Wolff Verlag, today best remembered as Kafka's original publisher but at the time most noted for Pantheon, its international art-book series. She soon made herself indispensable to Wolff not only as an editor of Pantheon but

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also as a translator of books into German. Helen and Kurt Wolff were married in 1931, and shortly after Hitler's assumption of power Wolff dissolved his publishing company and wisely moved with Helen and their infant son to Nice. "Don't forget," Mrs. Wolff told her interviewer, "[Kurt] had been publishing a lot of avant-garde writers—leftists and so-called degenerate artists—many of whom were Jewish." After Nice came Paris, and, in 1941, a harrowing escape from occupied France to the United States.

Within a year of their arrival in New York, the Wolffs had founded Pantheon Books, which at first was run out of their one-room apartment in Washington Square. They began with new editions of Dante, Goethe, and other writers in the public domain, but soon built a list of such contemporary authors as Hermann Broch, Robert Musil, and Mary Renault. Pantheon was chosen by the Mellon Foundation to be the original publishers of the Bollingen Series, which sponsored English-language editions of the complete writings of Jung, Valéry, and Unamuno. In the Fifties and early Sixties came a string of outstanding publishing successes: Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *Gift from the Sea*, Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*. The Wolffs left Pantheon in 1961 due to a disagreement with their investors, and later that year the firm was sold to Random House.

In 1962, the Wolffs were invited by William Jovanovich to publish books with Harcourt Brace under the imprint "A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book." The venture was only just launched when Kurt Wolff was killed in a pedestrian accident. In her grief Mrs. Wolff considered leaving publishing but was encouraged to continue by Mr. Jovanovich and many of the authors she'd edited with her husband. Over the next three decades, assisted only by a skeletal staff, she not only continued Kurt Wolff's work with Günter Grass, Iris Origo, Konrad Lorenz, and others but also hand-cultivated the American reputations of dozens of writers of her own choosing, among them Max Frisch, Italo Calvino, Stanislaw Lem, Georges Simenon, Danilo Kiš, Uwe Johnson, Amos Oz, and George Konrád. Perhaps the greatest success of her years with Harcourt Brace was the publication, in 1983, of that most unlikely of best sellers, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. But who other than Mrs. Wolff would have believed that this unapologetically abstruse novel, the first work of fiction by a then little-known Italian semiotician, could find an American readership *at all*?

When we think of Helen Wolff as an editor and a publisher, we think not only of the many fine books she brought over into English but also of the care with which she published each author on her list. One instance of this care can stand for them all. From 1970 on, Mrs. Wolff was the publisher of the Italian novelist Giorgio Bassani. His first book to appear here, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, had been published in 1965 by Atheneum. "I felt betrayed by the translation as it first appeared," Bassani later recalled, for unlike the Harcourt Brace editions of his books, all of which were translated by William Weaver and meticulously line-edited by Mrs. Wolff, "there were a number of mistakes, and it lacked subtlety and elegance." When the U.S. rights to *Finzi-Continis* reverted back to Bassani, he approached Mrs. Wolff about a paperback edition of the book, and in 1977, one appeared. But in defiance of all conventional publishing wisdom, it wasn't a cost-effective reprint of the Atheneum translation: Mrs. Wolff, though she expected no additional sales or even reviews to come out of it, granted Basanni's extravagant wish to have Mr. Weaver do a new translation from scratch. As Bassani later commented, "the difference between the translation in the Atheneum edition and the one in the Helen and Kurt Wolff edition is the difference between prose and poetry." But then, the difference between publishing as practiced by the majority and publishing as practiced by Helen Wolff is the difference between the expedient and the extraordinary.

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Angry history: Richard Pipes on the Bolshevik Revolution

by Hilton Kramer

My brother Evgeni Yakovlovich used to say that the decisive part in the subjection of the intelligentsia was played not by terror and bribery (though, God knows, there was enough of both), but by the word "Revolution," which none of them could bear to give up. It is a word to which whole nations have succumbed, and its force was such that one wonders why our rulers still needed prisons and capital punishment.

—Nadezhda Mandelshtam, in *Hope Against Hope*

Why is it that nearly eighty years after the Bolshevik Revolution—an event that did more to shape the history of this century than any other—we are still so reluctant to come to terms with the full scale of the moral horrors that followed in its wake? Why is it that we rarely, if ever, speak of a Soviet holocaust? After all, the brute outlines of this bloody history—not only in their general import, but often in specific numbers and details, too—have been known to us for a very long time. Similarly, the nature of the Soviet regime has long ceased to be a mystery, and the measures taken by Lenin, Stalin, and their successors to suppress all domestic political dissent while creating support abroad for the regime's criminal policies have passed into the folklore of the modern era.

Yet virtually every increase in our knowledge of the actualities and consequences of the Soviet system has also been met with, in the West, by an apparatus of subterfuge, apologetics, and denial so persistent and influential that it has become a permanent feature of cultural life. And it was not only in the distant dark ages of Lenin and Stalin that these scenarios of denial enjoyed respectable support. It is worth remembering the wholesale derision—in the media, in the academy, and among certain figures in the Democratic Party—that greeted President Reagan's characterization of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" in the 1980s. That the plain truth of that characterization was showered with such contempt had much to tell us about the illusions—illusions, above all, of political legitimacy—that still benefited the Soviet regime even in that late hour of its existence.

Some day the whole sordid story of this morally bizarre and intellectually compromised response to a regime based on cruelty and terror will have to be written, for it is very much a part of *our* history in this century, the history of the ideas and sentiments that have shaped American intellectual life. Twice in this century—first in the 1930s, and then again in the 1960s—we have seen those ideas and sentiments made hostage to a mythology of revolution which had its origin in the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917. What, in 1966, Lionel Trilling wrote about the radical movement of the Thirties—that "it may be said to have created the American intellectual class as we know it in its great size and influence" and that "it fixed the character of this class as being, through all mutations of opinion, predominantly of

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the Left"—applies with equal cogency to the radical movement of the Sixties. Whatever the differences between the Thirties and the Sixties—the substitution of Fidel Castro and Ho Chi Minh for Stalin as an object of worship, for example—the sanctity of the 1917 revolution remained inviolate. Which is one of the reasons why Lenin continued to be defended even when the crimes of Stalin had, perforce, to be conceded, and why in some left-wing circles Bukharin was nominated to fill the exemplary role that for an earlier generation of anti-Stalinist Marxists had been reserved for Trotsky. Even today, when the devastation wrought by the Bolshevik Revolution is plainer than ever to see in all its grisly actuality, we are still obliged to live with the remnants of those old scenarios of denial, which continue to enjoy a kind of ideological afterlife that has little to do with historical reality.

I was again reminded of what these old scenarios of denial now entail when, after reading Richard Pipes's brilliant new history, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*,[1] I turned to a review of this important book by Marshall D. Schulman, the Adlai E. Stevenson Professor Emeritus of International Relations at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University. Writing in *The New York Times Book Review* of April 17, Professor Shulman made little effort to disguise his distaste for Mr. Pipes's account of the early years of the Bolshevik regime—the years when Lenin decisively established all the principle features of Communist rule. It was a review that had the distinctive flavor of the old apologetics.

From the very first paragraph of this review, in which Professor Shulman spoke of Mr. Pipes as a writer seeking "to settle some old scores," to the last paragraph, in which he accused the author of showing "more interest in refighting old battles than in seeking retrospective insights into the workings of the Soviet system," *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* was treated as if it were little more than a Cold War polemic. From the outset, the code word "controversial" was invoked to stigmatize Mr. Pipes as a writer who failed to conform to liberal opinion on Soviet affairs, and the clincher came in the fourth paragraph of the review, in which the author of *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* was identified as the "director for East European and Soviet affairs on the National Security Council during the Reagan Administration." Yet nowhere did either Professor Shulman or *The New York Times Book Review* identify the author of this hostile review as the man who served as the State Department's special advisor on Soviet affairs in the Carter administration.

This was an important thing to know in reading this review, for much of it consisted of a spirited attack on Mr. Pipes—never labeled as such, of course—for his role in the Reagan administration's successful reversal of President Carter's failed attempt to, in Professor Shulman's words, "moderate the conflict" with the Soviet Union. ("Moderate the conflict" is, in this context, a euphemism for accommodating the imperatives of Soviet foreign policy.) The implicit assumption throughout Professor Shulman's review was that the Soviet system, despite its obvious evils, was somehow worth saving, or, failing that, that it would have collapsed anyway from its own internal weaknesses. (Never mind the contradictions that separate these two notions.) To this illusory assumption he added the explicit charge that in upholding what he called "the undifferentiated view of the Soviet Union as a totalitarian monolith, implacably hostile and incapable of change," thinkers like Mr. Pipes were somehow complicit in imposing upon our own society "a Soviet-style anti-Communism." This is a patent untruth, and it is the kind of untruth that is interesting now only as a measure of the bitterness and disappointment that is still felt among old liberals like Professor Shulman over the total failure of what used to be called, with varying degrees of admiration and irony, the Soviet experiment. It was odd, in any case, for Professor Shulman to

1 *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*, by Richard Pipes; Knopf, 587 pages, $35.

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accuse Mr. Pipes of wishing to settle some old scores and "refighting old battles" when to perform precisely these functions appeared to be the principal purpose of his own review—a case, perhaps, of what the psychologists call projection.

Still, though it didn't come as a surprise, there was nonetheless something grotesque about the spectacle of a major work of modern history—a book that for the first time recounts the horrific saga of the Bolshevik Revolution from a morally credible perspective—treated in the pages of *The New York Times* as if it were a collection of "dusted-off" debating points or political memoranda. *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* gives us, in fact, an immensely rich and variegated account of virtually every aspect of the fateful upheaval it undertakes to describe. This new volume is, of course, a continuation of *The Russian Revolution*, published in 1990, and like that earlier book, has been conceived, as Mr. Pipes writes in his introduction,

> to provide a more comprehensive account of the subject than hitherto available: that is, to look beyond the struggle for power which is commonly seen as the quintessence of the Revolution to its makers' designs and uses of that power.

Toward that end, Mr. Pipes devotes far more attention to the fate of culture and religion under the Bolsheviks than earlier histories of the Revolution. His chapter on "Culture as Propaganda" is a salutary antidote to the nonsensical idealizations that have lately been lavished on the subject by leftist art historians and other Western academics infatuated with the romance of an avant-garde in the service of the Revolution. We are thus reminded, for example, that

> great poetry, lasting poetry, was written by poets who insulated themselves from the turmoil and the politics of their time. Anna Akhmatova and her husband, Gumilev, as well as Mandelshtam, members of the Acmeist circle, the Imagist Sergei Esenin, and Boris Pasternak, led quiet, private, unsubsidized, and unadvertised lives. Later generations would recognize the poetry they wrote as among the noblest achievements of Russian literature—long after the shrill voices of the hate-mongers had been silenced and forgotten. For this they paid a price, however. Gumilev was shot in 1921 for membership in a "counterrevolutionary" organization: he is said to be the first Russian writer of note whose place of burial is unknown. (He believed that the Huns who in the fourth century had crossed southern Russia and under Attila ravaged Europe, had been reincarnated in the twentieth century as Bolsheviks.) Esenin killed himself in 1925. Mandelshtam perished in 1939 in a Stalinist camp where he had been sent for an anti-Stalin ditty. Akhmatova and Pasternak survived, but had to bear humiliations that less stalwart souls would not have endured.

It is not only about the fate of the arts under Bolshevism, moreover, that Mr. Pipes writes in this melancholy chapter on cultural life. Attention is also devoted to the transformation of education, to the assault on the institution of the "bourgeois" family, and to the ways in which the Russian language was changed to accommodate the ethos of the new regime.

> Jocose euphemisms were coined for the business of killing [Mr. Pipes writes]: "to send to a meeting," "to dispatch to Dukhonin's headquarters" (with reference to General N. N. Dukhonin, lynched by soldiers in late 1917), "to put into an envelope and mail," the last signifying to arrest and then execute.

By later standards, to be sure, the crackdown on intellectual dissent in the early years of the Bolshevik regime was relatively lenient. But five years into the Revolution, all that was to change.

> Lenin's relative tolerance of the intelligentsia came to an abrupt end in the spring of 1922. . . . He took a personal interest in the fate of hostile intellectuals, providing the GPU with

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> names and indicating punishments he wished imposed. His fanatical self-confidence now yielded to homicidal vindictiveness. . . . He instructed Dzerzhinskii to have the GPU undertake a thorough study of literary and academic publications to determine which were "overt counterrevolutionaries, accomplices of the Entente, the organization of its servants and spies, and corrupters of student youth," and hence, "candidates for exile abroad." Such "military spies" were to be "regularly and systematically" apprehended and expelled from the country. . . . Dzerzhinskii faithfully carried out Lenin's mandate, with the result that in the summer of 1922 scores of academics and writers [among them, Mr. Pipes points out, "some of Russia's most distinguished minds"] were imprisoned.

The "Stalinist" future was thus launched well before Stalin himself assumed dictatorial powers.

The chapter which Mr. Pipes devotes to "The Assault on Religion" is, if anything, even more harrowing than his account of the Communization of culture. It is also, as he stresses himself, a subject which previous histories of the Revolution have tended to minimize or omit altogether.

> In histories of the Russian Revolution [he writes], religion receives little if any attention. W. H. Chamberlin devotes to this subject fewer than five pages in a book of nearly one thousand. Other scholars (for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Leonard Schapiro) ignore it altogether.

This is a remarkable omission, and Mr. Pipes is no doubt correct in accounting for it when he writes that "such lack of interest can only be explained by the secularism of modern historians."

> And yet [he continues], even if historians are secular, the people with whom they deal were in the overwhelming majority religious: in this respect, the inhabitants of what became the Soviet Union—Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike—may be said to have lived in the Middle Ages. For them, culture meant religion—religious belief, but especially religious rituals and festivals: baptism, circumcision, confirmation, confession, burial, Christmas and Easter, Passover and Yom Kippur, Ramadan. Their lives resolved around the ceremonies of the religious calendar, because these not only glorified their hard and humdrum existences but gave even the humblest of them a sense of dignity in the eyes of God, for whom all human beings are equal. The Communists attacked religious beliefs and practices with a vehemence not seen since the days of the Roman Empire. Their aggressive atheism affected the mass of citizens far more painfully than the suppression of political dissent or the imposition of censorship. Next to the economic hardships, no action of Lenin's government brought greater suffering to the population at large, the so-called "masses," than the profanation of its religious beliefs, the closing of the houses of worship, and the mistreatment of the clergy.

It was Orthodox Christianity that, as Mr. Pipes writes, "bore the brunt of Communist persecution," but "Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam were not spared." By the mid-1920s, for example, "Hebrew was outlawed and taught only in clandestine private schools." Until the late 1920s Islam fared somewhat better. This "comparatively lenient treatment," Mr. Pipes writes, "was due entirely to political considerations, namely the fear of alienating the colonial nations whose support was critical to the strategy of the Comintern, since the Middle East Muslims were counted upon to undermine 'imperialism.'"

In this connection, another important feature of *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* is the attention it devotes to the Bolshevik reconquest of the Muslim regions of the Soviet empire. This, too, is a subject minimized or ignored in some earlier histories of the Revolution. W. H. Chamberlin, for example, gave it exactly one sentence: "Traditional racial feuds in the Caucasus and in Central Asia found expression in outbursts of pillage and murder." Which is, alas, to say

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almost nothing. Mr. Pipes, on the other hand, gives us some vivid glimpses of the way the ideological assault on the Muslim enclaves was conducted.

> The treatment of Asians by pro-Bolshevik Russians led the most prominent Soviet Muslim Communist to revise the orthodox Marxist theory of class struggle. The Tatar Mirza Sultan-Galiev was in his youth a teacher in the reformed schools. In late 1917 he went over to the Communists and made a rapid career as Stalin's protégé in the Commissariat of Nationalities. In articles published toward the end of 1919 in the official organ of his Commissariat, Sultan-Galiev argued that it was a fundamental mistake to rely on the West to bring about a global revolution because the weakest link in the chain of imperialism lay in Asia. This view was tolerable to the Kremlin since it did not contradict Lenin's theory of imperialism. But Sultan-Galiev did not stop there, and broadened his ideas into a full-fledged heresy in which some historians see an anticipation of Maoism.

"For these ideas," Mr. Pipes continues, "in April 1923 he was expelled from the Party and imprisoned on charges of forming an illegal nationalistic organization. L. Kamenev called him the earliest victim of a Stalinist purge."

In other directions as well, Mr. Pipes has considerably widened the focus of the history of the Revolution. The chapter devoted to the influence of Communism upon fascism and National Socialism is particularly important in this regard, reminding us—among much else—of what Hitler owed to Bolshevik precedents and Soviet practice. Above all, Mr. Pipes has written a history of the Revolution and its consequences that revivifies our understanding of what the scope of that new historical phenomenon—totalitarianism—actually entailed in all of its monstrous details.

> From the instant he seized dictatorial power [Mr. Pipes writes], Lenin proceeded to uproot all existing institutions so as to clear the ground for a regime subsequently labeled "totalitarian." This term has fallen out of favor with Western sociologists and political scientists determined to avoid what they consider the language of the Cold War. It deserves note, however, how quickly it found favor in the Soviet Union the instant the censor's prohibitions against its use had been lifted. This kind of regime, unknown to previous history, imposed the authority of a private but omnipotent "party" on the state, claiming the right to subject to itself all organized life without exception, and enforcing its will by means of unbounded terror.

About this regime "unknown to previous history," Mr. Pipes has written an avowedly "angry" book which communicates on its every page the author's intense feelings of moral indignation and spiritual horror at the human catastrophe it describes. About time, too. It is probably too much to hope that *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* will finally write *finis* to all the strategies of denial that have remained in place as a substitute for thought, but henceforth it will be a good deal easier to identify the advocates of those strategies as only the latest intellectual and moral casualties of the Revolution they continue to champion.

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When reason sleeps: the academy vs. science

by Roger Kimball

The first professor I saw was in a very large room, with forty pupils about him. After salutation . . . he said perhaps I might wonder to see him employed in a project for improving speculative knowledge. . . . Every one knows how laborious the usual method is of attaining to arts and sciences; whereas, by his contrivance, the most ignorant person at a reasonable charge . . . may write books in philosophy, poetry, politics, law, mathematics, and theology, without the least assistance from genius or study.
—Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World . . . By Captain Lemuel Gulliver*

El sueño de la razon produce monstruos.
—Francisco Goya

An English friend of mine tells the story of reviewing a book about the history of Russian Marxism for a major national newspaper here in the States. In the course of his review, he observed that G. V. Plekhanov was "the father of Russian Marxism." Minutes before the issue closed, an obtuse sub-editor took it upon himself to challenge this judgment. Surely it was Lenin, not Plekhanov, who deserved that august epithet. It just wouldn't do to call Plekhanov the father of Russian Marxism. My friend remonstrated; the sub-editor insisted; the minutes ticked by . . . Finally, they reached for a reference work that was handy: *pachysandra, Persia, pit viper, Pleiad, . . .* "PLEKHANOV, GEORGI VALENTINOVICH, 1857–1918. Russian revolutionary and social philosopher. . . . Often called the 'Father of Russian Marxism.'" The sub-editor digested this and, bloodied but not beaten, said petulantly, "Well, all right. You can leave it. *But it is a cliché.*"

I often think of this story when I consider the unedifying spectacle of academics in the humanities and social sciences attempting to deal with the barrage of criticism that has been leveled against them over the last decade. The first salvo came in 1984. In that year, the National Endowment for the Humanities, then directed by William J. Bennett, published *To Reclaim a Legacy*, a pointed attack on the way the humanities were being taught and a call to reshape the curriculum "based on a clear vision of what constitutes an educated person." The response to this report in the academy was a combination of disbelief and rage: disbelief that anyone could still seriously speak of such things as "civilization's lasting vision" and "its highest shared ideals and aspirations," rage that a mere government official (albeit one with a Ph.D. in philosophy) should dare to criticize the state of liberal education. If one were to judge from the long list of imprecations formulated to revile Mr. Bennett, one would have to conclude that he represented a monstrous threat to the survival of academic freedom, scholarly creativity, and true culture.

But the contempt showered on Mr. Bennett was mild compared to the apoplexy that greeted Allan Bloom when he published *The*

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Closing of the American Mind in 1987. Condescension turned to shock and, once again, to rage, as this impassioned exposé of the spiritual degradation of America's elite students shot up the best-seller list, lingering for months in the number one slot. Additional assaults on the academy followed: my own book, *Tenured Radicals*, Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (another best seller), David Lehman's *Signs of the Times*, Charles Sykes's *Profscam*, Camille Paglia's stinging essays on women's studies programs and kindred follies. Whether the subject was the institutionalization of Sixties radicalism on campus, political correctness, professorial dereliction, or the moral and intellectual fatuousness of deconstruction, the message was clear: something was very, very wrong with liberal education in American colleges and universities.

Again and again, the response in the academy to such criticism began in an access of panic, denial, and denunciation. But when it gradually became clear that nothing much was going to change—that the public was too uninterested and most college and university administrators were too pusillanimous to challenge the trendy imperatives of political correctness—then the response quickly modulated into one of hostile indifference. As with the officious sub-editor pontificating about Plekhanov, what began in denial ended with a shrug: what supposedly didn't exist yesterday is now routinely dismissed as old news, a "cliché."

This complacency may soon be upset. The publication of *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*[1] marks a vigorous new chapter in the attack on academic inanity. If any book can hope to reignite public outrage over the debacle that has been visited upon higher education in the humanities and social sciences, *Higher Superstition* is it. The Roman statesman Cato was fond of ending his speeches and letters with the admonition *Carthago delenda est*: "Carthage must be destroyed." Cato would have liked this book. It is a devastating and minutely described portrait of politicized intellectual corruption. The story it tells is one of arrogance, ideological posturing, and breathtaking pretentiousness. Embarrassment often competes with disgust as we follow professor after professor through the jargon-littered maze of half-baked pronunciamentos, wild generalizations, and fatuous political "criticisms" of subjects that are preposterously misunderstood. The effect is both deeply satisfying and deeply disturbing: satisfying in that so many would-be debunkers are definitively debunked, disturbing in that many of the targets are big-name professors at some of the best universities in the country. One is left with a host of depressing questions: Is this really what tenure was instituted to guarantee, permanent intellectual irresponsibility? Is this what counts as a "liberal arts" education these days? Is this what one gets in exchange for $25,000 per annum in college fees?

Anyone acquainted with the controversy over political correctness on campus will find himself initially on familiar ground in *Higher Superstition*. The authors avail themselves of the same carnival of specimens that other critics of the academy have visited for their examples. All our old friends are here: deconstruction, postmodernism, multiculturalism, eco-feminism, Afrocentrism, animal-rights activism—the whole menagerie. And the criticism launched against these fads and fashions is cognate with the criticism put forward in other books critical of these trends in the academy. There are, however, several things that distinguish *Higher Superstition* from other recent books critical of the academy.

In the first place, there is the distinctive focus of *Higher Superstition*. Where other books have dealt primarily with the way the left-wing politics and intellectual chicanery of professors in the humanities and social sciences have disfigured the teaching of their disciplines, this book concentrates on the

1 *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science*, by Paul R. Gross and Norman Levitt; The Johns Hopkins University Press, 314 pages, $25.95.

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way the left-wing politics and intellectual chicanery of professors in the humanities and social sciences have impinged upon and disfigured the reputation and prestige of science. In recent years, more and more literary critics, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have turned their attention to the "discourse" of science. It may almost go without saying that they have done this not in order to understand science, but to "deconstruct" its claims to truth and objectivity. They have applied to science the same techniques of textual criticism, gender-analysis, and ethnic grandstanding that won them such delicious notoriety when applied to literature, sociology, philosophy, etc. Intellectually and pedagogically, the results have been just as disastrous as they have been with literary criticism—just as disastrous and, if possible, even more absurd. Witness the existence of articles with titles like "Toward a Feminist Algebra," about which more below.

Higher Superstition is a guide to these absurdities. Written with clarity, wit, and passion, it is accessible to any educated layman. But, unlike other books of the genre, it is addressed first of all to scientists. Appropriately, both of the book's authors are themselves scientists. Paul R. Gross, former director of the Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratory, is University Professor of Life Sciences and director of the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Virginia; Norman Levitt is professor of mathematics at Rutgers University. Unlike the vast majority of professors they write about, then, Professors Gross and Levitt actually know something about science from, as it were, the inside.

Perhaps the thing that most distinguishes *Higher Superstition* from kindred attacks on the academy is its political orientation. That, at any rate, is what Professors Gross and Levitt would have us believe. Hitherto, the best-known attacks on the academy have been described as "conservative." Never mind that without exception they were written in the hope of salvaging such classic liberal values as objectivity, impartial criticism, and the ideal of advancement according to merit: all have been widely excoriated by academics as "conservative," "reactionary," "fascist." And that is on a good day. Professors Gross and Levitt are extremely, even comically, anxious to avoid being tarred with the brush marked "conservative." One of them, they announce in a footnote, is a member of Democratic Socialists of America. They agonize at very great length over their unhappiness with their choice of the phrase "academic Left." Again and again they assure readers that, had any other term filled the bill, they would have used it. They let us know that some of their best friends are feminists. They support affirmative action. Really, they insist, they are writing not about "enemies" but (wayward) "friends." In what is perhaps the low point of this sort of hand-wringing, they complain that debates between liberals and conservatives today "often provide a right-of-center, nominally Democratic neoconservative as representative of the former, and a neofascist as spokesman for the latter." All one can say is that the debates Professors Gross and Levitt watch are different from those available to the rest of us.

Fortunately, all this ideological throat-clearing is beside the point. It may salve the political consciences of the authors; but they will soon discover that it does nothing to absolve them in the eyes of their left-wing colleagues. And there is no reason that it should. *Higher Superstition* is as sharply polemical in its dissection of left-wing academic blather as anything yet written. Although they go out of their way to distance themselves from other attacks on political correctness, Professors Gross and Levitt are perfectly aware of the shameful way the Left employs moral intimidation to disarm criticism and silence opponents. This indeed is a subtheme of their book:

> If you decry the feminist critique of science, you are guilty of trying to preserve science as an old-boy's network. If you take exception to eco-apocalyptic rhetoric, you are an agent,

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> witting or otherwise, of the greed of capitalist-industrialist polluters. If you reject the convoluted cabalistic fantasies of postmodernism, you are not only sneered at for a dullard, but inevitably told that you are in the grip of a crumbling Western episteme, linked hopelessly to a failing white-male-European hegemony.

Sometimes the intimidation becomes blatant. A surgeon teaching at the University of California used animals in one of his post-graduate classes; one day he received the following telephone message from an animal-rights activist: "Either Dr. Moossa stops the course or I will shoot him in the head." Dr. Moossa canceled the course, and that group of students was presumably left to hone their skills on human patients.

It must also be said that, whatever their own political sympathies, Professors Gross and Levitt are refreshingly forthright about the privileged place that left-wing ideology now enjoys in the academy. What we might call the "myth of marginalization" is very dear to the Left; believing that one is part of an oppressed minority is a great aid to solidarity; but the idea that women or blacks or homosexuals or any other recognized "victim group" is discriminated against in the university today is ludicrous. The "only widespread, *obvious* discrimination today," Professors Gross and Levitt note, "is against white males." Although the academic Left subscribes to a long list of radical sentiments, their subsidized radicalism is a "radicalism without risk." Indeed,

> left-wing thinkers have never enjoyed anything remotely close to the current hospitality. Prestige-laden departments in the humanities and the social sciences are thickly populated—in some by now well-known cases we might say, without opprobrium [?!], "dominated"—by radical thinkers. Despite all protestations to the contrary, entire programs—women's studies, African-American (or Latino or Native American) studies, cultural studies—demand, de facto, at least a rough allegiance to a leftist perspective as a qualification for membership in the faculty.

Professors Gross and Levitt are equivocal about this entrenched leftism. But they are pellucid in their attack on the "peculiar amalgam of ignorance and hostility" characteristic of the academic Left's attitude toward science. They describe one book as "unalloyed twaddle," another as a "turgid and opaque tract"; the arguments put forward by their subjects are by turns "hallucinatory," "an irrelevant botch," "philosophical styrofoam," "interpretive contortion and hermeneutic hootchy-koo." Nor is their attack confined to employing a panoply of colorful epithets. Indeed, the great strength of their book is the unparalleled patience with which they anatomize their opponents' arguments. Dozens of representative texts are quoted at length and then carefully analyzed into oblivion. Taken all in all, *Higher Superstition* is the most damaging indictment of the left-wing academic establishment in the humanities yet to appear.

The book begins with a historical sketch of the relation between the academic Left and science. As Professors Gross and Levitt point out, one of the oddities of the current attitude of hostility toward science on the part of the academic Left is that, since before the Enlightenment, progressive intellectuals have tended to look to science and technology as instruments of emancipation. There is a good reason for this:

> The dissecting blade of scientific skepticism, with its insistence that theories are worthy of respect only to the extent that their assertions pass the twin tests of internal logical consistency and empirical verification, has been an invaluable weapon against intellectual authoritarianisms of all sorts, not least those that sustain social systems based on exploitation, domination, and absolutism.

Professors Gross and Levitt cite Romanticism—Romantic sentimentality might be the better term—as one source of the academic Left's hostility toward science. A more important source is the radicalism of the 1960s: that potpourri of attitudes and attitudinizing that includes a smattering of

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irrationalism, various bits of left-wing ideology, a generalized anti-bourgeois animus, and a strong dose of cultural and epistemological relativism. It is this last—relativism—that perhaps more than any other ingredient undergirds the academic Left's hostility toward science. Plucking a term from Nietzsche, Professors Gross and Levitt speak in this context of "perspectivism"—the idea that there are "no truths, only perspectives." This is the sacred dogma, the core creed of today's higher superstition. Simply assumed, rather than argued for, this corrosive relativism fuels the academic Left's blasé rejection of empirical truth and nudges it toward its current epistemological incontinence.

If this phenomenon is difficult to criticize systematically, it is partly because we are dealing here not with a coherent doctrine but with "a congeries of different doctrines, with no well-defined center." Professors Gross and Levitt's shorthand for this hodgepodge is "postmodernism." They note that, among much else, the epistemological relativism assumed by postmodernism makes it "a heaven-sent device for avoiding close argument and the analysis of particulars."

> Once a postmodern critic has at hand a license to read every proposition as its opposite when it suits his convenience, analytic skills of the more traditional sort are expendable and logic is effaced in the swirling tide of rhetoric. Once it has been decided that determinate meaning is chimerical and not worthy of the slightest deference from the well-honed poststructuralist postmodernist, the entire edifice of hard-won truth becomes a house of cards. Once it has been affirmed that one discursive community is as good as another, that the narrative of science holds no privileges over the narratives of superstition, the newly minted cultural critic can actually revel in his ignorance of deep scientific ideas.

If this description of intellecutal irresponsibility seems overstated, try the experiment of listening in on the humanities and social-science faculties at almost any prominent college or university. You will encounter the postmodernist ethos in all its exotic efflorescence. There will be Marxists decrying "bourgeois science," environmentalists palpitating about ozone and radioactive waste, deconstructionists chanting about the tyranny of phallologocentricism; there will be devotees of cultural studies telling you that the truths of science—like all truths—are "culturally constructed," a sentiment seconded by feminists skirling that science is shot through with gender bias; you will find animal-rights activists denouncing "speciesism," multiculturalists castigating the "privileging" of "Western science," and Afrocentrists complaining about the under-privileging of African "ways of knowing."

As Professors Gross and Levitt observe, one important thing that enables these disparate, sometimes contradictory, allotropes of left-wing rebellion to coexist peacefully is their "shared sense of injury, resentment, and indignation against modern science." At the center of this gospel is fury at the material achievements of Western culture. Since science is perhaps "the single aspect of Western thought and social practice that defines the Western outlook and accounts for its special position in the world," it has come to epitomize for the academic Left everything that is wrong with the West: its reliance on "linear thinking," its belief in objective truth, its faith in technology. The insurmountable problem for such critics is the dazzling success of science: its speculations about the world are put to the test daily, and daily they pass muster: the planes fly, the bridges stay up, the vaccines work.

Professors Gross and Levitt are the opposite of naïve. But, like anthropologists visiting some strange and backward tribe, they repeatedly betray a hint of bemused wonder as they catalogue the bizarre and outrageous opinions of their subjects. Consider: Sandra Harding, author of *The Science Question in Feminism*, describes Isaac Newton's *Principia* as a "rape manual." The Afrocentrist Hunter Adams assures readers that "early African writings indicate a possible understanding of quantum physics and gravi-

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tational theory." A young scholar named Tim Dean writes in the journal *October* that "the discourses of philosophy, linguistics, and sociology must be supplemented in a truly psychoanalytic account of AIDS by concepts drawn from the discourse of mathematics, principally post-Euclidean geometry, which provides for topologic mappings based on a non-Euclidean concept of space." Wittgenstein spoke of metaphysics as "the idling of language," but this is worse: it is language used as a deliberate affront to meaning and intelligibility. In short, it is sub-rational nonsense. But perhaps that is the point: after all, is not reason a bulwark of bourgeois respectability? What better way to tear all that down than to pervert reason deliberately by reducing language to a kind of ignorant babble? Professors Gross and Levitt observe that "we have the sense, encountering such attitudes, that irrationality is courted and proclaimed with pride. All the more shocking is the fact that the challenge comes from a quarter that views itself as fearlessly progressive—the veritable cutting edge of the cultural future."

One of the chief services performed by *Higher Superstition* is to have laid bare, once and for all, the breathtaking ignorance the academic Left betrays in its "critique" of science. The assumption is that all one needs to criticize science is the correct moral outlook: actual knowledge is held to be irrelevant. One finds

> books that pontificate about the intellectual crisis of contemporary physics, whose authors have never troubled themselves with a simple problem in statics; essays that make knowing reference to chaos theory, from writers who could not recognize, much less solve, a first-order linear differential equation; tirades about the semiotic tyranny of DNA and molecular biology, from scholars who have never been inside a real laboratory.

And on and on.

An extraordinary arrogance often accompanies the ignorance. Typical is the case of Andrew Ross, a trendy professor of "cultural studies" who has just moved from Princeton to New York University. Professor Ross dedicates his new book, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits*, to "all of the science teachers I never had. It could only have been written without them." Who could doubt it? Consider Professor Ross's blithe rejection of the effort to distinguish between authentic science and pseudo-science: "In the wake of Karl Popper's influential work . . . falsifiability is often put forward as a criterion for distinguishing between truly scientific work and the pseudo-scientific. But . . . falsifiability is a self-referential concept in science inasmuch as it appeals to those normative codes of science that favor objective authentication by a supposedly objective observer." Professors Gross and Levitt comment: "So much, then, for three thousand years of struggle to develop a systematic method for getting reliable information about the world!" What Professor Ross is really saying, they note, is that "science backs up its claims, whereas pseudo-science doesn't, but I don't care about the difference."

In many ways, the feminist assault on science is the most preposterous. As with Afrocentrism, the grip of feminist ideology is often so strong that adherents frequently lapse into gibberish. Thus we find feminists incensed that biologists should have been so sexist as to describe spermatozoa as actively pursuing and penetrating the ovum: sniff the authors of one influential feminist study group, this is to see fertilization as "a kind of martial gang-rape" in which the ovum is portrayed as "a passive victim, a whore."

I have already mentioned "Toward a Feminist Algebra." The point of this influential article, by Maryanne Campbell and Randall K. Campbell-Wright, is that gender-bias in mathematical word problems has discouraged women from learning mathematics. Yes, really. Hence they object to a problem in which a girl is running toward her boyfriend because it portrays *heterosexual* involvement (one about "Sue and Debbie" buying a house together gets their seal of approval); they object to a problem involv-

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ing construction workers because the workers are assumed to be male; and so on. What they want are problems "presenting female heroes and breaking gender stereotypes." And this is algebra? As Professors Gross and Levitt point out, there is no such thing as a "feminist mathematics." To dwell on the incidental details of a word problem is to misunderstand what math is all about. It matters not a whit whether Sam is selling hotdogs to Martha or Alice is peddling brownies to Gertrude. To miss this is to miss everything. The worst thing about such performances—and again the analogy with "Afrocentric science" comes to mind—is that they cheat students of really learning anything. Instead of encouraging women to learn mathematics—a laudable ambition—Campbell and Campbell-Wright's paper is used "to justify the use of mathematics classrooms as chapels of feminist orthodoxy."

If such drivel were the rare exception, it might be overlooked. Unfortunately, it has become the norm in feminist treatments of science. Take the work of N. Katherine Hayles. Professor Hayles holds an endowed chair at a major university; she is the recipient of a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation; she has been the president of the Association for Science and Literature and the chairman of the Literature and Science Committee of the Modern Language Association. Her book, marvelously titled *Chaos Bound*, is published by a distinguished university press. Professors Gross and Levitt describe the book as an attempt to draw parallels between chic literary theory (deconstruction, etc.) and the mathematics of chaos. The problem is that, mesmerized by the word "chaos," Professor Hayles has failed to learn anything about the subject she is writing about. The result is indeed chaos, but of a rather more pedestrian variety than she intended. "The special theory of relativity," she intones, "lost its epistemological clarity when it was combined with quantum mechanics to form quantum field theory. By midcentury all three had been played out or had undergone substantial modification." But this is hooey. Professors Gross and Levitt observe that, far from having lost "epistemological clarity," "special relativity and quantum mechanics are as solidly confirmed as it is possible for physical theories to be." They continue:

> While there may be some lingering doubts whether general relativity is quite the right model on the cosmological scale, the special theory has always triumphantly passed every empirical test. However physics develops in the future, any modification must subsume rather than displace special relativity, just as special relativity subsumed Newtonian mechanics. . . . As for quantum field theory, this is an ongoing project that engages the deepest amd liveliest intellects in physics and mathematics. "Played out?" The best that can be said for Hayles is that she confuses the fact that physics is very much a continuing discipline, and, therefore, has fascinating foundational problems left to solve, with some kind of philosophical and spiritual exhaustion. If anything is played out, it is the postmodernist's pretension to have something interesting to say about physics.

Professors Gross and Levitt have a lot more to say about Professor Hayles, none of it pretty. Particularly sobering is the realization that she presents a relatively mild case. Another big name in the feminists-deconstruct-science industry is Donna Haraway, a professor in the history of consciousness program at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Writing recently in *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Technology*, Professor Haraway informs us that she wishes "to suggest how to refigure—how to trope and how to knot together—key discourses about technoscience."

> Rooted in the (sometimes malestream and maelstrom) cross-stitched disciplines of science studies, this short essay is part of a larger, shared task of using antiracist feminist theory and cultural studies to produce worldly interference patterns. Because I think the practices that constitute technoscience build worlds that do not overflow with choice about inhabiting

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> them, I want to help foment a state of emergency in what counts as "normal" in technoscience and in its analysis. Queering what counts as nature is my categorical imperative. Queering specific normalized categories is not for the easy frisson of transgression, but for the hope for livable worlds. What is normal in technoscience, and in its analysis, is all too often war, with all its infinitely ramifying structures and strategems.

Remember that this woman is not some crank but a professor at a prestigious university and one of the leading lights of contemporary "women's studies."

The real problem with feminist notions of science is that the object of their attack is a figment: there is no such thing as "male science," any more than there is a "white science" or an "African science." Fired by a generalized resentment against "patriarchy," besotted with misunderstood technical jargon (savor, for example, Professor Haraway's use of "categorical imperative" above), these scholars have succumbed to a species of language mysticism. Phrases like "paradigm change," "chaos theory," "the uncertainty principle" are like catnip to them: a source of stirring intoxication.

It is not surprising that the acadmic Left denies the universality of scientific truth. This has long been a favorite gambit of mystagogues, including some eminent ones. Professors Gross and Levitt quote Philip Lenard, a Nobel laureate in physics who was also an ardent supporter of the Nazis. Here is Lenard denouncing Albert Einstein:

> German physics? one asks. I might rather have said Aryan physics or the physics of the Nordic species of man. The physics of those who have fathomed the depths of reality, seekers after truth, the physics of the very founders of science. But, I shall be answered, "Science is and remains international." It is false. Science, like every other human product, is racial and conditioned by blood.

Or gender. Or skin color. Or ethnicity. Or ideological affiliation. Take your pick.

Professors Gross and Levitt conclude by arguing for the "necessity of seeing to it that whatever is labeled as 'science education' in our colleges and universities *deserves* that designation." To this end they suggest that scientists participate in conferences and symposia where scientific issues are the ostensible subjects; they suggest likewise that scientists be consulted on promotion and tenure decisions for colleagues in the humanities who claim a professional expertise in the "discourse" of science. (Fare thee well, Andrew Ross! So long, Donna Haraway!) Naturally, such proposals will be unacceptable to the "humanists" whose follies are dissected in this book. But have they not forfeited their authority along with their credibility? And, indeed, should we not require "equal treatment" for the humanities, demanding that whatever is labeled as "humanities education" in our colleges and universities also *deserves* that designation?

It will be said that Professors Gross and Levitt are sterile rationalists, unattuned to the literary or speculative temperament. That is piffle. The problem is not the literary temperament but pernicious nonsense. Professors Gross and Levitt use the tag from Goya quoted at the beginning of this essay as one of their epigraphs: "When reason sleeps, monsters are born." As they note, the dictum has always been ambiguous. On one reading, it is a slogan for the Enlightenment: without reason, mankind is helpless before the arbitrary imperatives of superstition. On another, it cautions against the hubris of reason: the sleep of reason yields extravagant, often dehumanizing dreams. The academic Left has the peculiar distinction of exhibiting both vices: irrationalism and a hyper-rationalism unchastened by common sense. These are the failings that Professors Gross and Levitt attack. Toward the end of their book, they write that "the humanities, as traditionally understood, are indispensable to our civilization and to the prospects of living a fulfilling life within it. The indispensability of professional academic humanists, on the other hand, is a less certain proposition." It is difficult to disagree.

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One life, one art: Elizabeth Bishop in her letters

by Elizabeth Spires

If an unknown poet were to be offered a sort of cosmic bargain where he or she would live the life Elizabeth Bishop lived in return for the poems she wrote, I doubt there would be many takers. From infancy on, Bishop suffered some of the worst losses imaginable. Her father, a prosperous builder from a wealthy New England family, died in 1911 when she was eight months old. Her Canadian mother then suffered a series of nervous breakdowns that led to her permanent institutionalization in an asylum in Halifax when Elizabeth was five; Bishop never saw her again. Cared for first by her maternal grandparents in Great Village, Nova Scotia, a relatively secure and happy time, she lived briefly and quite unhappily with her paternal grandparents in Worcester, Massachusetts, and then with a favorite aunt until she was old enough to go away to boarding school. From childhood on, she suffered from terrible asthma and allergies; in her twenties and thirties, after repeated devastating episodes of uncontrollable "binge" drinking, she began to realize that her system was intolerant of alcohol. It was a problem she struggled with, with varying degrees of success, her entire life. Out of these early losses, crises, and dislocations, she, miraculously, formed herself into a poet.

A magnificent volume of Bishop's letters, edited by her longtime editor and friend Robert Giroux, has now been published.[1] It opens in 1928, when Bishop was seventeen, and concludes on October 6, 1979, the day she died. One of the marvels of this collection, which includes some wonderful photographs and a very helpful introduction and chronology, is how *present* Bishop's voice, tone, and sensibility were even in adolescence. Though most of the poems she wrote as a student at Vassar, with the exception of "The Map," could be classed as talented juvenilia, her early letters document a remarkably articulate and self-possessed young woman: lively, intellectually sophisticated, modest and well-mannered while at the same time direct and unapologetic. In one, in the "pre-feminist" age of 1933, she takes Donald Stanford, then a Harvard undergraduate (who would later become a co-editor of *The Southern Review*), to task:

> And one thing more—what on earth do you mean when you say my perceptions are "almost impossible for a woman's"? "Now what the hell," as you said to me, "you know that's meaningless." And if you really do mean anything by it, I imagine it would make me very angry. Is there some glandular reason which prevents a woman from having good perceptions, or what?

In another, she presents a delightfully idio-

1 *One Art: Letters*, by Elizabeth Bishop, selected and edited by Robert Giroux; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 668 pages, $35.

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syncratic and acute picture of the workings of poetic intuition:

> Have you ever noticed how you can learn more about other people—more about how they feel, how it would feel to be them—by hearing them cough or make one of those innumerable inner noises, than by watching them for hours? Sometimes if another person hiccups, particularly if you haven't been paying much attention to him, why you get a sudden sensation as if you were inside him—you know how he feels in the little aspects he never mentions, aspects which are, really, indescribable to another person and must be realized by that kind of intuition. Do you know what I am driving at? Well, if you can follow those rather hazy sentences—that's what I quite often want to get into poetry . . .

Although she avoided taking any formal classes in "verse-writing," her energy and aspirations at Vassar centered around writing and poetry. In one of those fortunate conjunctions of timing and luck, the college librarian provided the young poet with an introduction to Marianne Moore, with whom Bishop struck up a lifelong friendship and correspondence. For years, Moore was mentor, friend, and advocate, as well as an unconscious mother-figure (Bishop's own mother died in 1934, several months after her first meeting with Moore). Bishop's early letters to Moore are models of decorum: humorous, affectionate, anecdotal, self-effacing, and considerate. If two of the distinguishing features of a great letter-writer are the desire to please and the desire to entertain, Bishop was able to do both. Her famous poet's eye is evident in the letters she sent Moore from Key West, where she lived off and on from 1937 to 1949:

> The other night I went to hear the "Independent Quartette" of Atlanta, which had been making a sensation at Lillian's (the present maid's) church. . . . They were really a sextet and extremely good—the best thing of the sort I've ever heard down here. They wore zoot suits of narrow black and gray stripes, enormously padded shoulders, coats to the knees, and yellow shoes with knobs on the toes, very high collars, tie pins, black ties, white handkerchiefs arranged in four points, enormous white carnations, and around their necks on cords hung crosses three or four inches long that glittered like emeralds and rubies. In spite of all this and their rather lurid presentations—they prefaced their hymns with "Give us a hand, dear Christian friends"—they sang marvelously, and acted out some of the songs in a very queer dreamlike way, walking around the church and making very large, slow gestures. At one point they ran what they called a "contest." Each one put a handsome white silk muffler around his throat and took up a collection, individually—apparently 10¢ was a "point," and the littlest one, the bass, wrote the results down in a large account book. . . . The tenor won the "contest" and then showed off a little, humming a very high note until the audience nearly burst and then going off into a long falsetto yell. I almost thought I should wire Louise [Crane, an old friend and jazz enthusiast] about them—I don't think secularization would hurt them much!

But despite the delightful observations in many of the letters written from Key West, New York, Cape Cod, Maine, and Europe, the years from 1934 to 1951 show Bishop leading a peripatetic, lonely existence, checking in and out of residential hotels, renting apartments in New York for brief periods of time, traveling and visiting with lovers and friends, but without any real home, employment, or family to anchor her. And the years of the Depression and World War II were probably not good ones, from the standpoint of publishing, to be a young poet. It was not until 1946, after many rejections and frustrating delays, that her first book of poems, *North & South*, was published. With characteristic humor, she makes light of her difficulties to Robert Lowell during a lonely summer in Maine in 1948:

> Well, things must improve, I'm sure, and the place is beautiful, there's no getting round that. I am working on Tobias and the Prod-

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> igal Son and I just started a story called "Homesickness"—all very cheerful. I think almost the last straw here though is the hairdresser, a nice big hearty Maine girl who asks me questions I don't even know the answers to. She told me (1) that my hair "don't feel like hair at all," (2) I was turning gray practically "under her eyes." And when I'd said yes, I was an orphan, she said, "Kind of awful, ain't it, plowing through life alone." So now I can't walk downstairs in the morning or upstairs at night without feeling I'm plowing. There's no place like New England . . .

By 1951, Bishop was at a crossroads. Her drinking was more and more out of control. A stay at Yaddo was a disaster and her time as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress unhappily unproductive. It was at this point that luck intervened and the course of her life changed forever. Awarded a traveling fellowship from Bryn Mawr, she voyaged alone to South America and fell violently ill in Rio with "Quinke's Edema," brought on by an allergic reaction to a cashew fruit. She was invited to recuperate at the home of Lota de Macedo Soares, a lively, sophisticated woman from the Brazilian aristocracy, the two fell in love, and Bishop stayed on for fifteen years. Her relationship with Lota was a "marriage" in the true sense of the word, providing Bishop with a real home and a sense of security and constancy that had been lacking in her life. A letter to her physician and close friend, Dr. Anny Baumann, describes her new-found happiness:

> . . . the drinking and the working both seem to have improved miraculously. Well no, it isn't miraculous really—it is almost entirely due to Lota's good sense and kindness. I still feel I must have died and gone to heaven without deserving to, but I am getting a little more used to it. . . .
>
> I have two more birds, adorable little green and blue things, very tame. They love each other very much and live in a wonderful old homemade cage that resembles the dome of the Capitol in Washington.

The radical change in locale was good for her poetry as well as her psyche, leading her to new subject matter and freeing her to do some of her best work. She wrote to Baumann that "my Anglo-Saxon blood is gradually relinquishing its seasonal cycle and I'm quite content to live in complete confusion, about seasons, fruits, languages, geography, everything." Her new surroundings not only inspired poems about Brazil but allowed her to return to long-repressed memories of her early childhood in Nova Scotia, including the central event of her life, her mother's mental breakdown, which she wrote about in a masterpiece story, "In the Village." "It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia—geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even," she mused to Kit and Ilse Barker in another letter. It was during this time that she won the Pulitzer Prize in poetry for her second book, *A Cold Spring* (1955), and finished another, *Questions of Travel* (1965)—her happiest book, I think, in which love and poetic vocation are presented as countervailing forces to loss and madness.

Letter-writing had always been important to Bishop but probably never more so than during her years in Brazil, since it was her only way to keep up with distant friends. She wrote to Ilse Barker, "I am sorry for people who can't write letters. But I suspect also that you and I, Ilse, love to write them because it's kind of like working without really doing it."

The idyll of these early years in Brazil was not to last, despite Bishop's contentment with her expatriate existence. Her relationship with Lota began to deteriorate in the 1960s and ended with Lota's suicide in New York in 1967 (brought on, in part, by Lota's years of overwork and exhaustion as director of a huge park project in Rio). Unfairly blamed for Lota's death by some of their mutual friends, Bishop became an outsider in Brazil. Her letter to Maria Osser, written in San Francisco several months after Lota's death, is heartbreaking:

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> . . . I left Brazil with a very heavy heart and I hope never to see Rio again, although no doubt I'll have to. . . . I feel now as if I'd been living in a completely false world all the time—not false, but that no one ever liked me, really, or not many people, and all of them totally misunderstood the strength of the bonds between Lota and me. . . .
>
> I'd give everything in this world—a foolish expression but I can't think what I'd give, but "everything," certainly—to have Lota back and *well*—that is the awful thing about it all.
>
> . . . There will never be anyone like her in this world or in my life, and I'll never stop missing her—but of course there is that business of "going on living"—one does it, almost unconsciously—something in the cells, I think. Do you think if all the above weren't TRUE, I'd be here? . . . No—I'd be dead, too.

The hard-earned "art of losing" that she speaks of in her famous villanelle, "One Art" ("I lost two cities, lovely ones. And vaster,/ some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent"), carried her through the worst time of her adult life. Bishop was forced, once again, to construct a completely new life for herself, this time in Boston. Although her last ten years were not poetically prolific, they were a time of honor and accolades as she published her last book, *Geography III* (1976), assumed a larger presence on the American literary scene, gave readings, taught at Harvard (including a course on letters, "Readings in Personal Correspondence, Famous and Infamous, from the 16th to 20th Centuries"), took dreamed-of trips to Greece and the Galapagos Islands with a new love, and added a younger generation of writers to her circle of friends.

Although it would be untrue to say her last years were "easy" or unqualifiedly happy—health problems and money worries were constantly on her mind—she had not only *survived* but survived in full possession of her mental, creative faculties, outliving many of the more flamboyant personalities of her poetic generation: Dylan Thomas, Delmore Schwartz, Roethke, Jarrell, Berryman, and, finally, Lowell. For some of us in the 1970s, myself included, Bishop was one of the few sane role models for a young poet starting out, a kind of one-woman corrective to the nineteenth-century romantic myth of the artist as an alienated figure bent on self-destruction. The handful of poems she managed to finish in those last years (about one a year)—"In the Waiting Room," "Crusoe in England," "The Moose," and "Santarem," to name some of the best—were, as Howard Moss, the poetry editor of *The New Yorker*, once put it, "one of the few examples of lucidity left in the world."

These letters, besides giving the reader a beautifully detailed sense of the fabric of Bishop's daily life, contain fascinating glimpses into her poetic process, as embodied in her dreams, travel notes, false starts, and revisions. Writing to U. T. and Joseph Summers in 1955, Bishop reveals the donnée for "Varick Street" and "At the Fishhouses":

> I had an apartment right off Varick Street (lower Seventh Avenue) and there were printing presses across the street that kept going nights sometimes, using those pale blue daylight lights. Also Schrafft's factory was on one side and the Antiphlogistine place on the other, so in summer the odors became very strange. After one uncomfortable night I woke up reciting the refrain of . . . "Varick Street," and it seemed somehow applicable to the commercial outlook and my pessimistic outlook on life in New York and in general at that time. It is a dream poem—the refrain was in time with the presses which were going full blast, and all of it, except a few fixed-up words toward the end, was in my head. . . . Quite a few lines of "At the Fishhouses" came to me in a dream, and the scene—which was real enough, I'd recently been there—but the old man and the conversation, etc., were all in a later dream.

Her remarkable dreams were source material not only for her own poems but for one of Lowell's as well. (Her poems and letters influenced him on more than one occasion.) An earlier letter of Bishop's written

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while she was in Stonington, Maine, recounts a dream that Lowell incorporated into his poem "Water," which opens *For the Union Dead*:

> I think you said a while ago that I'd "laugh you to scorn" over some conversation you and J. had had about how to protect yourself against solitude and ennui—but indeed I wouldn't. That's just the kind of suffering I'm most at home with & helpless about, I'm afraid, and what with two days of fog and alarmingly low tides, I've really got it bad & think I'll write you a note before I go out and eat some mackerel. The boats bringing the men back from the quarries look like convict ships & I've just been indulging myself in a nightmare of finding a gasping mermaid under one of those exposed docks—you know, trying to tear the mussels off the piles for something to eat—horrors.

In addition to providing glimpses into her own writing process, the letters contain vivid and compelling portraits, harsh as well as affectionate, of various literary contemporaries. About Mary McCarthy, a former friend and Vassar classmate, Bishop is unforgiving:

> She's still saying some of the same things she said at college, apparently. Oh poor girl, really. You know, I think she's never felt very real, and that's been her trouble. She's always pretending to be something-or-other and never quite convincing herself or other people. When I knew her well I was always torn between being furious with her and being touched by her—because in those days her pretensions were so romantic and sad. Now that they're so grandiose, I suppose it's much harder to take. . . . Did you see her last effort in PR? The note said it was a chapter from a book called *The Group* and I already recognize the characters, more or less. . . . I have an awful feeling I'll probably appear in the book, and with all of Mary's second thoughts, heaven help me. It's fantastic writing—good, but without one shred of imagination, something that seems almost impossible—but Mary does it.

Reacting, in 1953, to the death of Dylan Thomas, whose poems she described as "just a straight conduit between birth and death . . . with not much space for living along the way," Bishop sympathetically describes her first meeting with him at the Library of Congress to Pearl Kazin:

> I felt frightened for him and depressed. Yet I found him so tremendously sympathetic at the same time. . . . *Why* do some poets manage to get by and live to be malicious old bores like Frost or—probably—pompous old ones like Yeats, or crazy old ones like Pound—and some just don't!
>
> But his poetry has that desperate win-or-lose-all quality, of course—and of course it too eliminates everything from life except something almost beyond human supportability after a while. But why oh why did he have to go & die now? . . . Poets should have self-doubts left out of their systems completely—as one can see most of the surviving ones seem to have. But look at poor Cal—and Marianne, who hangs on just by the skin of her teeth and the most elaborate paranoia I've ever heard of. And of course it isn't just poets. We're all wretched and half the time or three-quarters I think it is a thoroughly disgusting world—and then the horror vanishes for a while, mercifully. But in my own minor way I know enough about drink & destruction.

And in one of the most revealing letters in the entire book, in terms of what it says about Bishop as a friend and as an artist, she writes an anguished letter to Lowell concerning his right to both quote from, and fabricate, painful personal letters from his second wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, in his book-length poem *The Dolphin*:

> If you were any other poet I can think of I certainly wouldn't attempt to say anything at all; I wouldn't think it was worth it. But because it is you, and a great poem (I've never used the word "great" before, that I remember), and I love you a lot—I feel I must tell you what I really think. . . .
>
> Here is a quotation from dear little Hardy

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that I copied out years ago—long before *Dolphin*. . . .

"What should certainly be protested against, in cases where there is no authorization, is the mixing of fact and fiction in unknown proportions. Infinite mischief would lie in that. If any statements in the dress of fiction are covertly hinted to be fact, all must be fact, and nothing else but fact, for obvious reasons. The power of getting lies believed about people through that channel after they are dead, by stirring in a few truths, is a horror to contemplate."

I'm sure my point is only too plain. Lizzie is not dead, etc.—but there is a "mixture of fact & fiction," and you have *changed* her letters. That is "infinite mischief," I think. . . . One can use one's life as material—one does, anyway—but these letters—aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission—IF you hadn't changed them . . . etc. But *art just isn't worth that much*. I keep remembering Hopkins's marvelous letter to Bridges about the idea of a "gentleman" being the highest thing ever conceived—higher than a "Christian," even, certainly than a poet. It is not being "gentle" to use personal, tragic anguished letters that way—it's cruel.

Lowell, Bishop realized, had taken confessionalism to its most extreme point, sacrificing his life, and some of the people closest to him, to the service of art and blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction along the way. Her response reveals her own personal poetic reticence, in which painful events and characters from her own life often motivated poems without being used directly in them. In the same letter to Lowell, she admitted, "In general, I deplore the 'confessional'—however, when you wrote *Life Studies* perhaps it was a necessary movement, and it helped make poetry more real, fresh, and immediate." Her letter is an indicator of how painfully honest and direct she could be, not just with her dearest friends but with more casual literary acquaintances as well. The last letter she ever wrote, to poet and anthologist John Frederick Nims on the day she died, energetically begins, "I'm going to take issue with you—rather violently—about the idea of footnotes," concludes darkly with the observation that "the teaching of literature now is deplorable," and signs off, "Affectionately, Elizabeth." From first to last, Bishop was her own person: upbeat and pessimistic, concerned and cranky, tolerant and opinionated, desperate and resilient. The contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in her personality are revealed in her letters with a startling clarity and candor. It is this rounded, imperfect, human quality that draws us into the letters and provides a very different version of her life (and one, I should add, that seems more *true* in tone and in the telling) than Brett Millier's recent biography of Bishop.

One thing is certain: Elizabeth Bishop was not a tragic figure. Perhaps the great losses of her childhood prepared her early on for the upheaval she experienced in her adult life. Surely one of her most attractive qualities as a poet and correspondent was her clear-eyed ability to see and accept the "awful but cheerful" quality of life that she described in "The Bight." Yeats, if I'm remembering correctly, once described the ability of a great artist to hold two contraries in opposition. Bishop's letters, like her poems, are able to do this, aware as they are of the precariously balanced, two-sided quality of human experience. The act of writing poetry for her, as it is for all true poets, was a way to survive. Writing to Lowell at one point about his poems, she could have been speaking about her own:

> They . . . have that sure feeling, as if you'd been in a stretch . . . when everything and anything suddenly seemed material for poetry—or not material, seemed to *be* poetry, and all the past was illuminated in long shafts here and there, like a long-waited-for sunrise. If only one could see everything that way all the time! It seems to me *it's* the whole purpose of art, to the artist (not to the audience)—that rare feeling of control, illumination—life *is* all right, for the time being.

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Citizen Jane Jacobs

by Francis Morrone

Of the public intellectuals who came to prominence in the 1960s, many have excelled Jane Jacobs in the depth of their influence, but few have excelled her in sheer breadth of influence. Mrs. Jacobs's first book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, appeared in 1961, three years after she began her journalistic career, at the age of forty-two, as a member of the editorial staff of the now defunct *Architectural Forum*. The book, an at times downright uncivil assault on the reigning orthodoxies of city planning and city development, grew out of a handful of articles she had written, as well as out of some now legendary speeches that she delivered as a member of the audience at various planners' conferences. Since 1961, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* has never been out of print, and has sold some 250,000 copies and been translated into six languages. That such a book has remained continuously in print for thirty-three years means that it shows up on a great many college reading lists—an impressive achievement for a woman who has pursued her intellectual career without benefit of so much as an undergraduate degree. Mrs. Jacobs's second book, *The Economy of Cities*, appeared in 1969. *The Question of Separatism*, a defense of Québecois independence, appeared in 1980. *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, an extension of the critique of urban economics that she began with *The Economy of Cities*, appeared in 1984. Last year saw the publication of Mrs. Jacobs's fifth book, *Systems of Survival*. She is now seventy-eight, and as combative as ever.

Mrs. Jacobs's influence was crucial to the discrediting of 1950s- and 1960s-style urban renewal. Much of what has since become commonplace in city planning and urban design, while traceable to sources other than Mrs. Jacobs, nonetheless received a significant boost from the popular and academic acceptance of her eloquent critique. She can be credited, at least in part, for the growth of such trends as architectural preservation, infill building, expressway redesign (as in the case of Boston's Central Artery), festival marketplaces (e.g., the Rouse waterfront developments), and pedestrian-oriented, human-scale, mixed-use projects like Battery Park City. The peripatetic William H. Whyte, one of Mrs. Jacobs's most enthusiastic supporters, was directly responsible for the recent development of two public spaces in Manhattan: Greenacre Park and the redesigned Bryant Park—highly successful, if small-scale, projects clearly embodying Jacobsean precepts.

Perhaps alone among Sixties intellectuals, Mrs. Jacobs has been embraced across the political spectrum. On the Right she is hailed by anti-Utopians like Robert Nisbet and Roger Scruton, and by economic libertarians like George Gilder and Stuart M. Butler. She believes strongly in the free market, in entrepreneurial capitalism, in property rights, in limiting state power, and in technological progress. In 1970 she wrote

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an article for *Vogue* with the provocative title "More Babies Needed, Not Fewer." These are positions that have in recent years been strongly associated with the Right, or parts of it. She has also endorsed such Republican initiatives as enterprise zones and privatization of government services. On the Left she has been embraced for her practice and defense of Saul Alinsky–style "grass roots" community organizing, and can indeed be viewed as the godmother of NIMBY ("Not in my back yard")—which is why her name continues to be anathema to so many New York City politicians. Her love of "diversity" helped sprout the movement for multiculturalism. Anarchistic leftists like Richard Sennett and Marshall Berman cite her work enthusiastically. Finally, her antimilitarism appealed mightily to the anti-Vietnam young, and led her to abandon her country: in 1968, to protest the war and to whisk her sons to safety from the draft, she and her family moved from New York City to Toronto. Such an act of unpatriotism is anything but conservative.

Jane Jacobs's books are as densely argued and closely reasoned—indeed, *more* densely argued and closely reasoned—than nearly anything coming out of academia today. Her prose is majestic: difficult ideas are expounded with great clarity, in an English studded with sonorous Latinities. She excels at lists and catalogues, rhythmically cadenced and ever apt: indeed, she is the true heir of a tradition of cataloguing prose that includes Gilbert White, Thoreau, and Darwin. I believe that she has few peers among living American writers of prose.

As is often the fate of a writer whose complex arguments find a wide public, Mrs. Jacobs has attracted both critics and enthusiasts who misunderstand her work. Among her critics, Lewis Mumford wrote a savage attack on her in *The New Yorker* in December 1962—more than a year after the publication of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Mumford set a new standard for unfairness—he seemed, indeed, not to have read the book all the way through. He accused Mrs. Jacobs of overlooking "the endless rows and blocks and square miles of almost identical houses, spreading from Brooklyn to Queens, from Queens over Long Island, that have not the least touch of the diversity she finds so valuable in her own familiar Village quarters." In fact, she dealt extensively with such "gray areas." Mumford claimed that her theories were invalidated by the example of Harlem, which he said met her criteria for urban liveliness. Yet she dealt directly with why Harlem did *not* meet her standards. Even though he spent a year mulling over his response, Mumford was still barely able to focus, and sank into rank misrepresentation. Among her enthusiasts, Richard Barnet, a leftist ideologue, praised *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review*, interpreting what can only be called a primer of supply-side economics as a call for federal full-employment legislation—quite as though he had read another book entirely.

Often hailed, even by her enemies, for her originality, she is not so original as her eloquence at first makes her seem. *Death and Life* has much in common with the arguments of the English townscape movement, which dates back to the early 1930s in the pages of *The Architectural Review*; it also owes something to the contemporaneous writings of Gordon Cullen and Ian Nairn, whose thought in turn owes a great deal to Bauhaus sources and to a peculiarly English defense of the picturesque that can be traced back to Edmund Burke's notion of the sublime. A bitter critic of the planning theories of Le Corbusier, she fails to note that in his individual designs, and especially in his decorated interiors, he did as much as anyone to foment the very modern taste for vernacular variousness that is at the root of the ready acceptance that many of Mrs. Jacobs's ideas about cities have received. The anti-Utopian strand in Mrs. Jacobs's thought (and in that of the other townscape critics) has much in common with the writings of such critics of centralized planning as Hayek and Oakeshott. The organicism of her ideas about cities has an obvious lineage in Ro-

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manticism and in the criticism of Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris in the 1850s and 1860s by Louis Veuillot, Victor Hugo, Louis Bouilhet, and Victor Fournel. Not the least of Mrs. Jacobs's precursors is Camillo Sitte, whose *Der Stadtebau*, published in 1889, is arguably the greatest of all tracts on modern city planning.

The central issue of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is how to create the conditions that will make the middle class want to stay put and set down roots in the central city. In his book *Outgrowing Democracy*, the historian John Lukacs notes that "in 1956 the average American family moved every four years, an incomparable statistic which tells us more about Americans than many other figures, and which has no near equivalent in the otherwise democratic and Americanized societies of Western Europe." Given this peculiarly American proclivity to equate even the most minute shades of status with location, it is perhaps no wonder that vast expanses of once fashionable land in our central cities have come to be occupied by the worst-off members of our society. Lukacs identifies the years 1895 to 1955 as the "bourgeois interlude" in American history, the half century in which American life was both urban and urbane. But, he points out, "permanence of residence, that essential element of civilization, and especially of bourgeois civilization, was relatively rare, even at the height of the American bourgeois interlude."

The classic explanation of the form of American cities—the "ecological" model developed by the Chicago sociologists of the 1920s and 1930s—takes as its starting point the restlessness and rootlessness of American urban populations. Robert E. Park argued that the ecological model explained the peculiar innovative capacities of the modern city, but also, and concomitantly, the peculiar forms of social breakdown of the modern city: "in migration the breakdown of social order is initiated by the impact of an invading population, and completed by the contact and fusion of native with alien peoples." Migration causes the loosening and breakdown of traditional social organization, as alien ways confront and confuse native ways. The individual is emancipated from conventional constraints, though he is left without direction or control. Freed for new adventures, he is freed to innovate. The evidence of the individual's release from established social bonds is his aggressive self-assertion. Park quoted Frederick J. Teggart: "the study of the psychological effects of collision and contact between different groups reveals the fact that the most important aspect of 'release' lies not in freeing the soldier, warrior, or berserker from the restraint of conventional modes of action, but in freeing the individual judgment from the inhibitions of conventional modes of thought." Wyndham Lewis applauded the American rejection of "pious attachment to the soil" or "historical tradition," a rejection making possible an attachment instead "to a slightly happy-go-lucky vacuum, in which the ego feels itself free." "Happy-go-lucky vacuum" sounds an awful lot like Allan Bloom's "nihilism without the abyss." But as Myron Magnet has recently pointed out, the dream of the happy-go-lucky vacuum has turned into the nightmare of our present central cities, with homeless people defecating in the streets.

The Death and Life of Great American Cities revised the ecological model in an attempt to explain why some—a very few—inner-city neighborhoods remain stable and vital places to live, as well as why most decline. Mrs. Jacobs asserted that the stability of a neighborhood is a function of the presence of long-term residents. Dense, diverse inner-city neighborhoods, with lively, well-mannered public life—fostered by casual, everyday street interaction—and with sidewalk safety ensured by the presence of "eyes on the street," allow, more than does any other type of settlement, people to stay put, to set down roots, even as their lives and incomes and tastes change. Because individuals change as they live, so must city neighborhoods be able to accommodate changing individuals. Most types of settle-

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ment do not do this: status suburbs, opportunity-poor small towns, inner-city ghettos. Settlements lacking the resources for residential permanence, that accommodate only narrow ranges of taste, income, and family circumstance, are migratory way-stations, prey to the forces of urban destruction. The ecological model is the way-station theory of urban development, since it assumes the migratory patterns of transient settlement—and outward-spreading physical decay—to be the "natural" course of metropolitan growth. For Mrs. Jacobs, the most important question about cities in 1961 was: "How can cities generate enough mixture of uses—enough diversity—throughout enough of their territories, to sustain their own civilization?" It was a profoundly conservative question, and she believed she found her answer in her own neighborhood of Greenwich Village.

One rides a wave while reading Jane Jacobs. The elements of her arguments follow so tightly one from another that it is not until one has put the book down that one begins to think of all she has omitted. America has a long anti-urban tradition. Did not Thomas Jefferson, one of the most revered figures in our history, warn against the development of big cities in the new nation? Do not American high-school students read Emerson and Thoreau, exponents of an American intellectual tradition that holds city life to be morally inferior to rural life? Do not many—most?—Americans simply dislike urban life? In writing about the effects of automobiles on cities, Mrs. Jacobs fails to recognize something that Robert Moses (himself a non-driver) knew only too well: Americans *like* getting around by car. Indeed, they like it so much that they are willing to orient their very lives around the car. With her two books on urban economics, Mrs. Jacobs seemed to abandon a number of the precepts of *Death and Life*. Where in 1961 Los Angeles was to her the paradigm of everything a city should not be, in her two books on how cities grow it is one of her stars: a city whose entrepreneurial economy should serve as a model for the rest of the country. Never mind that it is the opposite of her beloved Greenwich Village.

Her thesis that prosperity is a matter of generating new work out of old, and that cities are where such generation can be carried on most effectively, is compelling. She is harshly critical of the way nation-states the world over treat their cities, which is the triumph of politics over economics. To counter the concentrated power bases that are cities, politicians do everything they can to empower non-city areas, through income redistribution, spreading of political power, and embracing economic theories like those of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and John Maynard Keynes that obscure the vital economic role of cities by treating nation-states rather than cities as the salient entities for economic analysis. It is well to point out, for example, that in America today a city such as New York has been largely tamed so far as its power relative to the rest of the country is concerned, since New York pays more in taxes to the rest of the country than it gets back. There are those who claim that cities are parasitic upon their regions and countries. Nothing could be further from the truth, and we can thank Jane Jacobs for so forcibly driving this point home.

All this, as I say, is very compelling indeed. But it begs the question: What, if Los Angeles is Mrs. Jacobs's new paradigm, is meant by *city*? And in what sense save the most materialistic can, say, Paris and Taipei be thought to be the same kind of settlement? A city is, ultimately, much more than its economy. "A city," Mrs. Jacobs wrote in *Death and Life*, "cannot be a work of art." In the most resonant sentence of his critique of Mrs. Jacobs, Lewis Mumford responded: "The citizens of Florence, Siena, Venice, and Turin will please take note!"

Mrs. Jacobs's latest book, *Systems of Survival*, is written as a conversation among a retired Manhattan publisher, three of his past authors (a mystery novelist, a biologist, and a radical environmentalist), and his niece (a lawyer). These "characters" are not

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exactly fleshed out, except that we are told what they eat and drink, and they all speak with exactly the same voice—that of Mrs. Jacobs. Also like her, each is a champion clipper of newspapers. The publisher has summoned this group to his Gramercy Park flat to discuss moral dilemmas in commercial life, and they meet periodically over several months.

The upshot of their sessions is the elaboration of a distinction between two equally necessary moral "syndromes." Taking her vocabularly from Book IV of Plato's *Republic*, Mrs. Jacobs distinguishes between a "commercial" and a "guardian" morality. The commercial moral syndrome includes such precepts as voluntary agreement, honesty, easy collaboration with strangers, competition, respect for contracts, efficiency, industriousness, optimism, and so on. The "guardian" moral syndrome includes the shunning of trade, the exertion of prowess, discipline, ostentation, honor, fatalism, and so on. Such moral virtues as cooperation, courage, moderation, mercy, etc. are "esteemed across the board," and apply equally to the commercial and guardian codes.

The guardian code is appropriate for hunters and gatherers, warriors, the military, the church, and government. The commercial code is appropriate for trade, commerce, and industry. The morality appropriate to guardians is fundamentally different from and must be kept separate from the morality appropriate to those engaged in commerce. Mrs. Jacobs holds that both moral codes are equally valid and necessary but that they must be kept distinct: immorality ensues from their mixture. She is punishing on the subject of how the Soviet Union confused the two moral codes by attempting to dictate production quotas, as though commercial life could be placed under military control. Closer to home, she criticizes the "hostile takeover" mentality that has been such a conspicuous feature of the American business scene in recent years. What she fails to deal with is the considerable empirical evidence that, in her much-derided 1980s, American industry actually increased productivity, created jobs at a brisk pace, and unleashed—partly through "junk bonds"—torrents of capital for start-up enterprises. She seems here to be doing what she accuses the Soviets of having done: being blinded by ideology to the necessary conditions of commercial success.

The value of Mrs. Jacobs's work was summed up best by the literary critic Roger Sale, who wrote that her books are principally "about what one could see if one opened one's eyes." After reading *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Sale reported, "I spent long hours walking and driving around, flabbergasted and pleased at how much I could learn." What higher praise can one critic receive from another?

But when it comes to her prescriptions for how to improve our urban life, I wonder if Mrs. Jacobs has not been overwhelmed by reality. In 1961 she was preoccupied by crime and strategies for its prevention. Yet who in New York today would not gleefully return to the crime statistics of thirty-three years ago? In 1961, the Bronx precinct that came to be called "Fort Apache" reported 18 murders, 183 robberies, and 667 burglaries. Ten years later: 102 murders, 2,632 robberies, and 6,443 burglaries. Nothing in Mrs. Jacobs's writings can begin to account for this enormous increase in criminal behavior. Physical and economic arrangements, alas, have little or no bearing on people's moral sense. The best recent attempt at an explanation of the increasing savagery of American urban life is Myron Magnet's *The Dream and the Nightmare*, which offers a Jacobsean list of its own: "chronic lawlessness, drug use, out-of-wedlock births, nonwork, welfare dependency, and school failure." In the face of our culture's wanton rejection of bourgeois values, Mrs. Jacobs's prescriptions for urban design and economic dynamism may be no more than pipe dreams. When one is confronted by an aggressive panhandler on Broadway, one thinks more about the disastrous social policies of radicals like Thomas Szasz than about the gentle urbanism of Jane Jacobs.

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Anna Akhmatova

by John Simon

"Poetry is what gets lost in translation," observed Robert Frost, and was only partly right. The thrust and sweep of epic poetry translates well enough: there is no dearth of decent translations of Homer, Virgil, Dante. Philosophical poetry also survives quite well: Eliot's *Four Quartets*, for example, has been successfully rendered into a number of languages. Lyric poetry is the one that has the most to lose.

There is, obviously, the problem of rhyme. Unrhymed poetry fares much better in translation: Walt Whitman reads just about as well (or poorly) in French or German. Even as delicate an unrhymed lyric as Leopardi's "L'infinito" has thrived in English. But rhyme is a killer. With elaborate rhyme schemes, tricky rhyming words, and short lines (dimeter, trimeter), the difficulty increases exponentially. Think of Byron's *Don Juan*, or this, from Heine: "Sie sassen und tranken am Teetisch,/ Und sprachen von Liebe viel./ Die Herren, die waren ästhetisch,/ Die Damen von zartem Gefühl." Verses 2 and 4, with their masculine rhymes, are no problem: "And talked about love and such" and "The ladies who felt so much." But 1 and 3 are impossible: the splendid joke lies in rhyming, femininely at that, *Teetisch* and *ästhetisch*, "tea table" and "aesthetic." Failing this, you've got nothing.

But there are poems untranslatable not because of their intricate rhyme scheme, rich rhymes, or fancy prosody. There exists something even more basic. In my doctoral dissertation,[1] I quote from the journal of Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly for September 19, 1836: "[Maurice de] Guérin est venu. Causé de la poésie des langues, qui est toute autre chose que la poésie des poètes." I commented: "Languages have their intrinsic poetry, a poetry they yield to the proper touch with gracious forthrightness." This is the kind of *objet trouvé* that certain words or sequences of words offer up to the poet, as blocks of marble supposedly suggested to Michelangelo the figures he would hew from them.

Take the last lines of the beautiful "Járkálj csak, halálraitélt" (Keep walking, condemned man) by the great Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti, which, after giving the contemporary poet various ways to live, concludes with "S oly keményen is, mint a sok/ sebtöl vérzö, nagy farkasok." Literally: "And as toughly, too, as the from many/ wounds bleeding, great wolves." (The Hungarian "s," by the way, is our "sh.") What is a translator to do, confronted with these darkly resonant sounds? Shoot the poem in the foot, or himself in the head? There is no way "great wolves" can render the mighty rumble of *nagy farkasok*. (*Nagy*, incidentally, is a monosyllable, not unlike our *nudge*.) This is the *poésie des langues*, the poetry inherent in the sounds of a language's words, and it is this more than anything that makes

1 *The Prose Poem as a Genre in Nineteenth-century European Literature*, by John Simon (Garland Publishing, 1987), page 139.

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a poet such as Anna Akhmatova virtually (virtually? totally!) untranslatable into English.

Consider the opening quatrain of a three-stanza poem of 1921, which the poet dedicated to her friend Natalya Rykova. The "literal" prose translation in Dimitri Obolenski's *Penguin Book of Russian Verse* runs: "All has been looted, betrayed, sold; death's black wing flickered [before us]; all is gnawed by hungry anguish—why then does a light shine for us?" Peter Norman's translation reads: "Everything is ravaged, bartered, betrayed,/ The black wing of death has hovered nearby,/ Everything is gnawed through by hungry gloom,/ Why then did we feel so light of heart?" Stanley Kunitz manages to get one rhyme into his translation: "Everything is plundered, betrayed, sold,/ Death's great black wing scrapes the air,/ Misery gnaws to the bone./ Why then do we not despair?" With all due respect, Kunitz would never have published such poetry under his own name. Finally, here is the version of Walter Arndt, one of our principal rhyming translators from the Russian: "All is looted, betrayed, past retrieving,/ Death's black wing has been flickering near,/ All is racked with a ravenous grieving,/ How on earth did this splendor appear?"

This seems passable at first glance, but look now at the original: "Vsyo rashishchenyo, predano, prodano,/ Chernoy smyerti mel'kalo krilo,/ Vsyo golodnoy toskoyu izglodano,/ Otchega zhe nam stalo svetlo?" There is no way the sonorities of that very first line can be conveyed in English, especially the play on *predano*, *prodano*. And not even the supposedly literal version does justice to the simplicity of the last: "Why then did it become light for us?" with *stalo* and *svetlo* again creating an echo effect. Russian poetry is a poetry of sound effects *par excellence*, because Russian is a sonorous, declamatory language; this is what those latter-day stadium-filling poets—the Yevtushenkos, Voznesenskys, and Akhmadulinas—called "pop poets" by Akhmatova, were to exploit to her disgust.

And yet she, too, benefited from big public readings at various times in her life. For Russia is that rare country in which poetry is loved by the masses, a country where simple folk quote poetry at one another and discuss it as people here do a football game. Because they often declaim in huge auditoriums and stadiums, Russian poets have adopted a vatic mode of recitation: part hieratic, part histrionic, loud and singsongy. It was Mandelshtam who reproached one of the most stentorian perpetrators with, "Mayakovsky, stop reading your verse. You sound like a Romanian orchestra." But the vatic mode is still with us, and even such a Westernized poet as Joseph Brodsky, Akhmatova's dearest disciple and protégé, subscribes to it wholeheartedly. This vatic mode, in turn, battens on the "poetry of languages," as the Acmeists, the group of poets to which Akhmatova belonged, certainly did. The Poets' Guild, as the Acmeists called their splinter group from the Symbolists, believed, as Max Hayward puts it, that "language was like any other material, and in fashioning poetic artifacts from it, one had to take account of its natural qualities and limitations."[2]

Anna Andreyevna Gorenko was born in Odessa in 1889, but was moved as a tot to St. Petersburg, living mostly in Tsarskoye Selo, the delightful suburb whose most famous inhabitant had been Pushkin, to whom the future poet was to dedicate many searching critical-historical studies. Her father was a naval engineer; she was the third of five children. One brother was killed in the Revolution, another committed suicide; both

2 From the very useful introduction to *Poems of Akhmatova*, selected, translated, and introduced by Stanley Kunitz with Max Hayward (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1973). For my purposes, the two most important collections of source material in English were *Anna Akhmatova: My Half Century, Selected Prose*, edited by Ronald Meyer (Ardis, 1992), and *Anna Akhmatova and Her Circle*, edited by Konstantin Polivanov and translated by Patricia Beriozkina (University of Arkansas Press, 1994).

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beautiful sisters died of tuberculosis, from which only a thyroid condition saved Anna.

When Papa Gorenko bemoaned that the tomboyish girl would become a poet and thus besmirch the family name, the seventeen-year-old changed her name to Akhmatova, as having descended on her mother's side from the Tartar ruler Akhmat, himself a descendant of Genghis Khan, and the last leader of the Golden Horde. As Joseph Brodsky writes in his essay "The Keening Muse" (1982),[3] "the five open a's of Anna Akhmatova had a hypnotic effect and put this name's carrier finally at the top of Russian poetry." In 1905, Anna's parents divorced, and she finished the gymnasium first in Yevpatoria on the Black Sea, then in Kiev. A crush Anna had on a handsome student at St. Petersburg University remained unrequited. She herself quit her law studies and eventually yielded to the persistent and protracted wooing of the poet Nikolay Gumilyov (1886–1921), whom she married, lovelessly, in 1910. The marriage lasted three years, and produced Anna's only child, Lyov.

It was a strange marriage, with infidelity on both sides, but also real love from Gumilyov. Nikolay at first dismissed his wife's verse as insignificant, advising her to become a dancer instead. But upon his return from a lengthy trip to Africa, he was genuinely impressed by Anna's new poems, and told her she must publish a volume. Soon Gumilyov, Akhmatova, and Osip Mandelshtam became the mainstays of a new movement that a hostile critic dubbed "Acmeist." Gumilyov was executed in 1921 for his alleged part in a counterrevolutionary conspiracy, an affair that remains opaque; Mandelshtam died in the gulag in 1937. Akhmatova survived—often precariously—till 1966, and never renounced Acmeism, indeed becoming more Acmeist as she grew older. It was a poetry of the here and now, eschewing both the mysticism of the Symbolists and the radicalism (often, but not always, political) of the Futurists.

3 Collected in *Less Than One: Selected Essays*, by Joseph Brodsky (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986).

When Anna left Gumilyov after three years, it was because she had fallen in love with Vladimir Shileiko, an Orientalist of stature. Being married to him meant becoming his research assistant while also holding down a librarian's job at the Agronomic Institute. Needless to say, this impeded her own writing. Nevertheless, her verse collections, *Evening*, *Rosary*, and *White Flock*, made the young Akhmatova one of the most popular poets of Russia, and this reputation was confirmed by *Plantain* (or *Wayside Herb*, the Russian word carries both meanings), and *Anno Domini MCMXXI*, to say nothing of such later masterpieces as *Requiem* and *Poem Without a Hero*.

What did she look like? There are many likenesses of her by various artists. Too bad that of Modigliani's sixteen drawings (Anna and Amedeo had a touchingly innocent flirtation when she was honeymooning in Paris with Gumilyov) only one survives. The poet Georgy Adamovich writes: "When people recall her today, they sometimes say she was beautiful. She was not, but she was more than beautiful, better than beautiful. I have never seen a woman whose face and entire appearance—whose expressiveness, genuine unworldliness, and inexplicable sudden appeal—set her apart . . . among beautiful women anywhere. Later her appearance would acquire a hint of the tragic: Rachel in *Phèdre*, as Osip Mandelshtam put it. . . ." Or, to quote Ronald Meyer, "Virtually every account refers to the poet's grandeur, regal bearing and stately demeanor. The adjective *velichavaya* (stately, majestic, regal) functions as a code word for Akhmatova." And he quotes an eyewitness, a woman who saw her in 1910 in the poet Vyacheslav Ivanov's literary salon: "Lithe, tall, and svelte, her head wrapped in a floral shawl. The aquiline nose, her dark hair with the short bangs in front and held in place in back with a large Spanish comb. The small, slender mouth that seldom laughed. Dark, stern eyes. [Others call them bright gray.] It was impossible not to notice her."

"A fine, unpretentious woman" Pasternak called Akhmatova in a letter to his cousin

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Olga Freidenberg. Yet the unpretentious woman was justly proud of her looks, as when she told Natalya Roskina that "sculptors had no desire to sculpt her because she wasn't interesting to them: nature had already done it all." Her nose, by the way, was not aquiline but, even more imposingly, shaped like a big fleshy "S." And consider this tribute from the great satirist Yevgeny Zamyatin, commenting on Annenkov's painting: "The portrait of Akhmatova—or, to be more exact, the portrait of Akhmatova's eyebrows. Like clouds, they throw light and heavy shadows on the face, and in them, so many losses. They are like the key to a piece of music; the key is set, and you hear the speech of the eyes, the mourning hair, the black rosary on the combs."[4]

After the breakup with Shileiko (another three-year marriage) in 1921, Anna moved in with two Petersburg friends, the composer Artur Lurye (or Lourié) and the actress Olga Glebova-Sudeikina, a famous beauty. (A "sex-bomb," Nadezhda Mandelshtam contemptuously called her.) This may well have been a sexual *ménage à trois*; at any rate, it induced a creative outburst in Anna. Years later, her longest and most renowned work, *Poem Without a Hero*, was to take off from the 1913 suicide of Vladimir Knyazov, a young cadet whom Anna loved, but who loved and was rejected by Olga.

Her fame having peaked around 1921–22, Anna was due for a reaction. Blok died after a painful illness, and Gumilyov was executed for his alleged counterrevolutionary activities, both in 1921. Akhmatova's fifth volume, *Anno Domini MCMXXI*, appeared in 1922, after which she published no other book till 1940. Attacks on her multiplied, and there was a ban on publishing her. Lurye and Sudeikina emigrated to Paris and, like other friends, urged Anna to follow suit. She refused and, in one of her finest poems, explained why. Instead, she moved back in with Shileiko, from whom she was divorced, but who traveled much, and whose St. Bernard needed looking after.

The poet's health was precarious: tuberculosis plagued her, and, later, heart attacks. While convalescing in a pension in Tsarskoye Selo, she met again Nadezhda Mandelshtam, ten years her junior, with whom she was to be linked in lifelong friendship. She also met Nikolay Punin, the critic and historian, who was to become her third husband, though the marriage was never officially registered. Although she was to stay with him fifteen years ("fifteen granite centuries" she calls it in a poem), the marriage as such probably didn't last longer than the usual three years; but where else was she to go? This despite that a previous Punin wife and, later, a subsequent one inhabited the same house. And as with Shileiko, Anna became an amanuensis to Punin, helping him with translations and lectures. Arrogant and promiscuous, he treated her worse; yet when asked later on which husband she loved most, she implied that it was Punin.

After the Central Committee's unpublished but binding resolution that she was no longer to be printed, Akhmatova worked on her unsubsidized Pushkin studies and on translations, which were allowed her. The Thirties were dominated by Stalin and Yezhov's Great Terror. Anna was staying with the Mandelshtams in 1934 when Osip was first arrested; soon Punin and Lyov, Anna's son, were imprisoned too. They were released upon Akhmatova's petition to Stalin, who liked her poetry, which may eventually have saved her own life. Lyov was to be in and out of prison for much of his life; Mandelshtam, re-arrested, died in the gulag in 1937, as Punin did later on.

Between 1939 and the outbreak of World War II, Akhmatova's fortunes were low, indeed. The critic Korney Chukovsky noted that she didn't even have a warm coat, or, often, enough money for the streetcar. It was at this time that Chukovsky's daughter, the

4 *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, edited and translated by Mirra Ginsburg (University of Chicago Press, 1974), page 90. The "rosary on the combs" refers to the little ornamental spheres on the diadem-like comb, and also alludes to the title of Akhmatova's second volume, *Rosary*.

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writer Lydia Chukovskaya, met Akhmatova and became her Boswell. She kept *The Akhmatova Journals*, three volumes in the original, of which we now have the first, 1938–41, as translated by Milena Michalski and Sylva Rubashova, with fifty-four poems —those mentioned in the text—Englished by Peter Norman.[5]

There is something very unsatisfying about having to read these journals on the installment plan. An important character such as Vladimir Garshin, a physician and professor of medicine, and at this time Anna's lover, will appear frequently in these pages, but a footnote on page 21, barely identifying him, concludes: "For more details on him, see *Journals*, vol. 2." Yet the reader should know more. When, like other artists in wartime, Anna was evacuated to Tashkent (whither she traveled clutching the precious manuscript of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony), she conducted a loving correspondence with Garshin, although he wrote relatively infrequently, and then often about other women. Finally, however, he proposed marriage. Anna not only accepted but even agreed to his request to drop her own proud name and become merely Garshina. When she arrived in, as she put it, "the hungry and cold city of post-blockade Leningrad," Garshin met her at the station and chillingly asked where she wanted to be taken. She named the old Punin apartment. "He took me there, said goodbye at the entrance, and kissed my hand. We never saw each other again. . . . I know very well how relationships are ended, and thank God, I've done it myself a thousand times. But this was simply incomprehensible." Garshin, it turned out, was already married.

There are other problems with Chukovskaya's notes. When a new figure appears, a footnote directs you to an endnote. But it is often not the endnote you expect, which should be, let's say, number 19. Instead, you're directed to look ahead to, say, note 64, where this person is dealt with more extensively. Thus later, when you legitimately get to note 64, you find yourself rereading what you've already read. It is fortunate that the publisher, at the last minute, added a glossary, as it were annotating Chukovskaya's notes. But confusion thrives in other ways, too. The *dramatis personae* appear in three guises: with their full names, i.e., first name, patronymic, and last name; or, thereafter, first name and patronymic; or, often, nickname only—or diminutive of the nickname. So when on a given page a Nikolay Ivanovich (i.e., Khardziev, the poetry specialist and historian) jostles a Nikolay Nikolayevich (i.e., Punin), and then a Nikolay Stepanovich (i.e., Gumilyov) pops up, it's hard to keep them apart. When we next hear the nickname Kolya, it might take even a Russian reader a while to figure out which Nikolay is meant. Of course, it turns out to be yet another: Kolya Demidenko.

Still, one should not be put off. *The Akhmatova Journals* begins with a moving prologue in which Lydia Chukovskaya tells about how she lost her husband to the gulag; how she, too, might have lost her life but for a friend's warning phone call; and how her having a husband in the camps brought her closer to Akhmatova, who had a son there. The conversations she doesn't dare report in her journal are the many ones about these and other cherished prisoners; instead, there is much talk about writers and writing, and about the trivia of daily life. Especially poignant is the evocation of the way much of Akhmatova's poetry, unsafe to commit to paper, survived:

> Anna Andreyevna,[6] when visiting me, recited parts of "Requiem" . . . in a whisper, but at home in Fontanny House did not even dare to whisper it; suddenly, in mid-conversation, she

5 *The Akhmatova Journals, Volume 1, 1938–41*, by Lydia Chukovskaya; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 310 pages, $27.50.

6 I transliterate the patronymic as "Andreyevna" rather than "Andreevna," as do the translators of the book. Throughout my article, I have silently made such changes in an attempt to achieve consistency, which, even so, may well have eluded me.

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> would fall silent and, signaling to me with her eyes at the ceiling and walls, she would get a scrap of paper and a pencil; then she would loudly say something very mundane: "Would you like some tea?" or "You're very tanned," then she would cover the scrap in hurried handwriting and pass it to me. I would read the poems and, having memorized them, would hand them back to her in silence. "How early autumn came this year," Anna Andreyevna would say loudly and, striking a match, would burn the paper over an ashtray.

But already from the outset of the book, in its English translation, we see sloppiness creeping in. Thus the code name the women used for the secret police is given on one page as Pyotr Ivanich; on the next, as Pyotr Ivanovich. Or there'll be a comment such as "Paul was murdered in that room," without any explanation in footnote or endnote. Again, in May 1939, Anna tells us how much she admires Joyce's *Ulysses*, even though it's a mite too pornographic for her; she has read it four times. By October 1940, she tells of reading this "great and wonderful" book six times. Could she have read that difficult work two more times in seventeen months? Was she given to exaggeration? Did her mind wander? Chukovskaya doesn't say.

She walked lightly, this fifty-year-old woman who was often trailed by two secret policemen and who always carried her pocketbook and a shabby suitcase with her writings with her out of fear they might be secretly searched. But she was terrified of crossing wide streets, even when empty, and would cling anxiously to whoever accompanied her. Although she disliked Tolstoy, and mounts a splendid attack on *Anna Karenina*, she concedes that he could be marvelously *zaum*. (*Zaum* or *zaumny yazik* refers to transrational or metalogical discourse, as invented by Khlebnikov and the Futurists, a distant precursor of *poésie concrète*.) Anna herself preferred established languages, reading Dante in Italian and, after six months of mostly self-taught English, Shakespeare in the original. But for all the various languages she knew, Russian spelling and punctuation were beyond her; she even misspelled the name of her beloved Annensky, the only poet she admitted to being influenced by.

Anna thought poorly of men because there were few to be seen in the prison queues, and perhaps also because none of her husbands ever hung a picture of her over the table. She was unable to judge her own poems until they were old, which is why she avidly recited the new ones to friends, eager for their judgment as well as memorization. She lived in great poverty, often subsisting on potatoes and sauerkraut; sometimes there was no sugar for the tea she'd serve her guests. Here is a characteristic scene, as Anna and her friend, the actress Olga Visotskaya, decide to go queue up in front of the Procurator's office:

> Anna Andreyevna insisted that Olga Nikolayevna should wear her autumn coat (Olga Nikolayevna only had her summer coat here), and she herself would wear her winter coat.
>
> "It will be hard for you to stand in your winter coat," said Olga Nikolayevna. "Better for me to put on the winter coat, and you the autumn coat."
>
> But Anna Andreyevna disagreed.
>
> "No, *I'll* put on the winter coat. You won't be able to handle it. It's tricky. It hasn't had a single button on it for a long time now. And we won't manage to find new ones and sew them on. I know how to wear it even without buttons, whereas you don't. I'll wear the winter coat."

It is piquant to discover Akhmatova admitting to not understanding one of her own poems. She repeatedly declared that she wrote two kinds of poems: those that seemed to come from an external dictation and were easy to write, and those that she willed herself to write and were impossible. She considered Hemingway a great writer, although she hated the cruelty of his fishing. Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, in his "Meetings with Akhmatova," reports that she "approved of observations comparing her early poetry with the prose of Hemingway and describ-

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ing it as 'novella-like.'" This ties in with something Mandelshtam wrote: "Akhmatova brought into the Russian lyric all the enormous complexity and wealth of the Russian novel . . . Akhmatova's origins lie completely within Russian prose, not poetry. She developed her poetic form, keen and original, with a backward glance at psychological prose."[7] What it all seems to add up to is straightforwardness, lucidity, and narrative progression, apparently considered more appropriate to prose.

Tom Sawyer, for Akhmatova, was "an immortal book. Like *Don Quixote*." A bold view in its way, but not unusual for her, who, for example, dared place the *Epic of Gilgamesh* above the *Iliad*. Some of her nonliterary ideas were even stranger: "For some reason, she had got into her head that the steps began right outside her apartment door, and I could not persuade her to cross the landing for anything." Poor Akhmatova! She could no longer even pronounce "sh" and "zh" clearly; some of her front teeth were broken. Nor could she, a pariah in the house of Punin, get a pass to the garden of the House of Entertaining Science (!), where they were all living: "He is someone, a professor, but what am I? Carrion."

Her most cherished poems could not be published; her earlier ones she no longer cared for, and couldn't understand why other people liked them. I myself am more than a little puzzled by her own and other people's judgments on her poetry. In one of her autobiographical sketches, Akhmatova writes that of her entire first book, *Evening* (1912), "I now truly like only the lines: 'Intoxicated by a voice/ That sounds exactly like yours . . .'" With all allowances made for what gets lost in translation, it is impossible to understand what could make those two verses special. Even more mysterious, though, is the recollection of the poet Georgy Adamovich about the other great modern Russian poetess, Marina Tsvetayeva: "She [had] just read Akhmatova's 'Lullaby,' and praised it, saying that she would give everything she had written and would write in the future for a single line from that poem: 'I am a bad mother.'" Even if you allow for the context (a father is speaking), how can that line have such value? There is perhaps something even beyond the poetry that gets lost in translations from Akhmatova.

Amusingly, Anna discusses Pasternak's indifference to her work and goes on to comment with wonderful outspokenness: "Haven't you noticed that poets don't like the poetry of their contemporaries? A poet carries with him his own enormous world —why does he need someone else's poetry? When they're young, about 23 or 24, poets like the work of poets in their own group. Later though, they don't like anybody else's —only their own." Vyacheslav V. Ivanov confirms this: "Certainly Akhmatova was not inclined to listen to the praise of other literary figures of the first decade." Her attitude to Tsvetayeva was particularly ambivalent, even though Marina was much more generous: she called her rival "Anna Chrysostom of all the Russians," and her beautiful poem "To Anna Akhmatova" begins "O muza placha, prekrasneyshaya iz muz!" (O muse of weeping, loveliest of muses). This became a metonym for Akhmatova: Muse of Weeping—or, as Brodsky renders it, Keening Muse.[8] Notice, again, the eloquent fanfare of *prekrasneyshaya*; how is an English translator to do justice to that?

Yet there were also times when the Russian language seemed to thwart Akhmatova. There is a droll page in the *Journals* where Anna agonizes to a couple of friends about something she had written: "One line has been vexing me all my life: 'Gde milomu muzhu detey rodila [Where she bore her dear husband children].' Do you hear: *Mumu*?! Can it be that neither of you, both such lovers of poetry, has noticed this mooing?" Whereupon she proceeds to recite Pushkin's "Monument" to her friends—only, as a

7 In *Mandelstam*, by Clarence Brown (Cambridge University Press, 1978), page 97.

8 The poem is handsomely set to music in Shostakovich's *Six Poems of Marina Tsvetayeva*.

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footnote tells us, it wasn't that at all, but the epilogue to her own *Requiem*; she was trying to mislead those who, she claimed, were bugging her room. But the greater, metaphysical, risks of her profession haunted her most: "The word is much more difficult material than, for instance, paint. Think about it, really: for the poet works with the very same words that people use to invite each other to tea. . . ."

What is the poetry of Anna Akhmatova really like? Here is how Chukovskaya sees it:

> When you first apprehend it, it does not strike you by the novelty of its form as does, say, the poetry of Mayakovsky. You can hear Baratynsky and Tyutchev and Pushkin—sometimes, more rarely, Blok—in the movement of the poem, in its rhythms, in the fullness of the line, in the precision of the rhymes. At first it seems like a narrow path, going alongside the wide road of Russian classical poetry. Mayakovsky is deafeningly novel, but at the same time he is unfruitful, barren: he brought Russian poetry to the edge of an abyss. . . . Akhmatova's little path turns out to be a wide road in fact; her traditional style is purely external . . . within this she brings about earthquakes and upheavals.

Frankly, in struggling with her poems in Russian—never mind the translations—I cannot find the earthquakes. But I do see a poet with an original vision and a personal voice who manages to maintain her individual talent within the tradition. No wonder she admired T. S. Eliot.

Strange where poets come from! As a child, Anna had no poetry surrounding her: "We didn't have any books in the house, not a single book. Only Nekrasov, a thick, bound volume. My mother used to let me read it on feast days and holidays. This book was a present to Mama from her first husband, who shot himself. . . . I have loved poetry ever since I was a child and I managed to get hold of it somehow. At the age of 13, I already knew Baudelaire, Voltaire and all the *poètes maudits* in French. I started to write poetry early but . . . before I had even written a line, all those around me were convinced that I would become a poetess."

If Chukovskaya were doing her job right, she would answer some troubling questions here. But she never mentions Nekrasov as one of the influences on Akhmatova's poetry—perhaps because he was greatly concerned with social issues, which Anna, until much later on, was not. But he was a loosener and modernizer of diction, someone from whom Anna may have learned things. The real question, though, is: How did the thirteen-year-old daughter of Russian bourgeois manage to get hold of Baudelaire? (That she knew French is, in Imperial Russia, believable.) And what of this quaint juxtaposition: Baudelaire, Voltaire? Is the sage there merely for the rhyme? As a lyric poet, he is known only for a few poems of love and friendship, and for some terse, biting epigrams. Could Anna's short poems in *Rosary* (or *Beads*) owe something to the latter? Or could something of the former have influenced the manner of the poetic teenager—say this, to Mme du Châtelet: "On meurt deux fois, je le vois bien:/ Cesser d'aimer et d'être aimable,/ C'est une mort insupportable;/ Cesser de vivre, ce n'est rien"? But the most puzzling bit here is "all the *poètes maudits*." It seems impossible for Anna to have gotten hold of even Rimbaud in 1902, to say nothing of the lesser *maudits*. Lydia should have asked some important questions here, though, to be sure, they were interrupted by the entrance of an old woman—shades of Coleridge and the person from Porlock.

Akhmatova harbors some pretty radical ideas about poetry: "Only through contemporary art can one understand the art of the past. There is no other path. And when something new appears, do you know how a contemporary should feel? As if it is pure chance that it is not he who wrote it, as if . . . somebody had snatched it out of his hands." And what a country for poets, this Russia! As Lydia and a woman friend leave Anna's place, the following happens: "Tusya walked me right up to my house. On the way she

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recited Tyutchev's 'Spring' to me . . . which, until now, I hadn't given the attention it deserves; and then together we recited Baratynski's 'Autumn,' to which Shura [another friend] had introduced us. . . . I thought: This may be the best poem in Russian literature." None of these women was a poet; what they were is Russians.

From this derives Lydia's worshipful attitude toward Anna, which at times becomes cloying, as when the biographer comments on Anna's refusal to fight for a paid vacation owed to her, which the poet contemptuously rejects as "the communal scuffle." Comments Chukovskaya: "Oh, how grateful I am to her that she understands so well who she is, that in preserving the dignity of Russian literature, which she represents at some invisible tribunal, she never takes part in any communal scuffle!"

The poet's stoicism was indeed heroic, as the state treated her shabbily. "That's my life, my biography," she allows. "Who can renounce his own life?" Much later on, in 1954, she was to formulate it more nobly to Lydia's father, Korney: "I have been very famous and very notorious, and I know now that essentially it's just the same thing." And to Georgy Adamovich: "My lot was to suffer everything it's possible to suffer." So you believe it when Lydia reports, "Anna Andreyevna put the kettle on. We had tea without sugar, with a stale roll." Amid such misery, Anna would prodigally dispense insight: "[Vyacheslav Ivanov] was . . . an outstanding poet, but his poems were often bad. No, no, there is no contradiction here; one can be a remarkable poet, but write bad poems." Or: "The Modernists did a great thing for Russia. . . . They handed back the country in completely different shape from that in which they received it. They taught people to love poetry once again, even the technical standard of book publishing went up."

"I don't know any other country where . . . there is a greater need for [poetry] than here." She was right. In the large, cold, poor, and often lonely spaces of Russia, poetry came to fill a void. If (as it is said) sex was for the French the *cinéma des pauvres*, for average Russians it tended to be poetry. And, of course, gossip. There are delicious pages here of Akhmatova gossiping, for example, about the women in Blok's life, in the midst of which she digresses about Punin: "'But such an accumulation of wives'—once again, she tapped Nikolay Nikolayevich's wall lightly—'is utter nonsense.'" She mocks the pettiness of various literary circles, and concludes, "I am the only one who is indifferent to what people think of my poetry." (But here is Korney Chukovsky: "Akhmatova divided the world into two uneven parts: those who understand her poems and those who don't.")

All her life Akhmatova remained a firm believer in Christianity, Russia being perhaps the premier country for practicing Christians among its artists and intellectuals. A tolerant woman, she was nevertheless repulsed by the homosexual excesses in Mikhail Kuzmin's poetry. She makes shrewd observations about Dostoyevsky: "These are all aspects of his soul. . . . In reality, there never was or will be anything like it." She evokes charmingly her youth as a nervy, unconventional tomboy, and sadly admits to her present discombobulation. I find it regrettable that she so dislikes Chekhov, whose plays, for her, "epitomize the disintegration of theater"; in both his plays and fiction "everybody's situation is hopeless." In Natalya Roskina's memoir, "Good-bye Again," Anna is even blunter: "He was shortsighted in his view of Russia. If one looks too closely, all one sees is cockroaches in the cabbage soup."

In her youth, we learn, Anna was seemingly double-jointed; people thought she should join the circus. (No wonder Gumilyov first suggested she become a dancer!) In maturity, it was her mind that became agile and keen, correctly perceiving, say, the influence of Joyce on Hemingway, Dos Passos, and the rest. She had no delusions about fame: "When you're standing in a courtyard, wet snow falling, queuing for herring, and there is such a pungent smell of herring that your shoes and coat reek of it for ten days, and someone behind you recites: 'On the

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dish the oysters in ice smelled of the sea, fresh and sharp . . .?—that is something else entirely [from her celebrity in Imperial Russia]. I was gripped with such a fury that I didn't even turn around." Yet this strong, proud woman couldn't finish reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "I felt too sorry for the Negroes."

The Akhmatova Journals, Volume I ends with the 1941 wartime evacuation of Anna, Lydia, and other notables, first to Chistopol, then to Tashkent in Uzbekistan, in Central Asia. It was a difficult sojourn, and there is a fascinating episode (relegated to a footnote) where Chukovskaya gushes to Marina Tsvetayeva about how lucky it was for Akhmatova to have escaped at least Chistopol: "She would certainly have died there. . . . After all, she can't do anything for herself." Tsvetayeva interrupts: "And you think I can?" Soon after, the forty-nine-year-old Tsvetayeva hanged herself. Perhaps the last memorable quotation in this volume has Anna reading her beloved Lewis Carroll again in Tashkent and asking, "Don't you think we too are now through the looking glass?"

There is, of course, much more to even this relatively short first volume. But Peter Norman's translations of some Akhmatova poems are not it. Like all other such translations that I am aware of, they do not begin to convey a true poet. What to do? To reproduce some of her poems in Russian would be redundant for those who know the language, and useless for the rest of us. The best I can do is cite some evaluations of her work.

We have many good descriptions of her personality (I particularly like this from the generally odious Walter Arndt: "Young Roland on his way to the dark tower, crossed with a Beardsley Salome"), but few helpful ones of her verse. Zinaida Gippius (or Hippius), the leading poetess of the preceding generation, rated her and Pasternak highest among their generation.[9] Sidney Monas called her "the supreme mistress of the verbal gesture, poetess of tragic love, who became, in her old age, the poetess, too, of endurance and survival."[10] Aleksandr Blok carped at first: "She writes verses as if standing before a man and it is necessary to write as if standing before God." (Ironically, though, Akhmatova remarked to Vyacheslav V. Ivanov that "there was no humility in Blok's poetry, that humility could only be found in orthodoxy.") Later, Blok considered the truest poets to be Mayakovsky and Akhmatova, "whose muse he saw as 'ascetic' and 'monastic.'"[11]

This is a curious evaluation of someone known as a poet of love, but even more curious is that by Anna's close friend Nadezhda Mandelshtam: "Akhmatova was a poet not of love but of the repudiation of love for the sake of humanity." You might think that this refers to the change in Akhmatova's later poetry, but no: "This woman with a zest for life had rejected all earthly things since her early youth."[12] The gap between such contradictory perceptions is perhaps bridged by Brodsky's view: "It is the finite's nostalgia for the infinite that accounts for the love theme in Akhmatova's verse, not the actual entanglements." Which, in turn, should be balanced against the point of Renato Poggioli in a book that Akhmatova, to be sure, disliked: "The muse of Anna Akhmatova is memory, a memory incredibly near in quality, if not in time, to the incidents she records from the exclusive viewpoint of her 'I.' [Or as Akhmatova put it *contra* Browning in her *Pseudo-Memoirs*: "I speak myself and for myself everything that

9 See *Zinaida Hippius: An Intellectual Profile*, by Temira Pachmuss (Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), page 381: "Although she admired Akhmatova's achievements in poetic expression, Hippius disagreed with her 'typically feminine approach to love,' devoid of all mystery and sublimation."

10 In his introduction to *Selected Works of Nikolai S. Gumilev* (State University of New York Press, 1972), page 17.

11 *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, Vol. II, by Avril Pyman (Oxford University Press, 1980), pages 141 and 363.

12 For the quotations from Nadezhda Mandelshtam, see Polivanov, *op. cit.*, pages 110 and 114.

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is possible and that which is not."] Yet in what the poetess reports there is no afterthought or hindsight: one would say that she represents objectively a past which has only a subjective reality." [13]

For what may be the best overview, we must return to Brodsky's "The Keening Muse": "She was, essentially, a poet of human ties: cherished, strained, severed. She showed these evolutions first through the prism of the individual heart, then through the prism of history, such as it was. This is about as much as one gets in the way of optics anyway." But for the effect that Akhmatova had on other people, I go back to Chukovskaya's prologue, entitled "Instead of a Foreword": "Before my very eyes, Akhmatova's fate—something greater even than her own person—was chiseling out of this famous and neglected, strong and helpless woman a statue of grief, loneliness, pride, courage." Short of a reading of her poetry in the original, this will have to do.

And what lay ahead for Anna? It is absurd to summarize so much in a few words, but here goes. After even worse persecution in the Forties under Zhdanov[14] than in the Thirties under Yezhov, expulsion from the Writers' Union and near-starvation (living off the kindness of friends), then ultimate reinstatement, increased economic comfort and various honors, even the power to protect and promulgate others in her profession. Finally trips abroad to receive a major literary prize in Italy, and an honorary doctorate from Oxford—also reunion in Paris with long-lost friends and lovers. It came very late, and was not really enough. But it provides a mellowly bittersweet ending to a life of fantastic ups and downs.

13 In *Poets of Russia*, by Renato Poggioli (Harvard University Press, 1960), page 231.

14 The notorious cultural commissar Andrey Zhdanov proscribed Akhmatova in a lengthy execration boiling down to her being "half whore, half nun." In his crude way, Zhdanov was right: she was in fact half glorious love poet and half impassioned religious moralist.

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Poems
by Daniel Mark Epstein & John Haines

The ferryman

(after a tale of Dunsany)

For him it was not a matter of years
Or even centuries, but wide floods of time
And the ancient heaviness and ache
In his corded arms that had become
Part of the grand scheme the gods had made.
Now if they should send a cruel head wind
How could it help or hinder or change things
Except to divide all time in his memory
Into two equal portions? So evenly gray
Everything looked where he rowed, if any
Radiance flickered a moment among the dead,
On the face of a Cleopatra or a Bernhardt,
The ferryman never would have noticed it.

Yet he did notice and thought it strange
When the dead began arriving in such numbers:
They come in hundreds, sometimes thousands now
Who used to come in dozens, long ago.
His job was not to count, it was to row.
But then for a long time there was no traffic,
And this is uncommon, he thought, for the gods
To send no one down from earth for a decade—
Though gods in their wisdom know what's best.

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Then one man walked the pier. His little shade
Sat shivering on the skiff as it pushed off.
Only one passenger: the gods know best.
The weary ferryman rowed on and on
And the river sighed the way Grief in the dawn
Of ages moaned and sighed among her sisters,
A song that could not die like the echoes
Of human sorrow failing on the earth,
Though it was old as Time and Charon's pain.

From the slow river the boat loomed to the coast
of Hades. The lone passenger stepped ashore
As Charon turned his boat toward the world.
"But wait, I am the last," said the new ghost
Alarmed by Charon's face against the sky—
For no one had ever made him smile before,
No one had ever seen the ferryman cry.

—Daniel Mark Epstein

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Lost owl

When the sky is right, the moon and stars
Shine through the window on my son's bed,
Lighting his way to sleep. But last night
He called to me: An owl, he said,
Was singing from the oak tree in our yard.

An owl, I wondered, in this city where
All species are more or less endangered?
"Go to sleep. You must have heard a cat."
"But look!" he cried. "There is the bird!"
So I got up to sit with him in the dark.

On a high branch backlit by the moon
The pointed ears, the round head of the owl
Cut from the sky a perfect silhouette
Which chilled me even though it thrilled my son.
I sat with him in the darkness a long time

Charmed by his pure joy in the owl's song,
Known for centuries as an omen of doom.
What was it doing outside my child's room?
Singing, clearly, for a captive audience,
I in my fear, my son in glad innocence.

I yawned. The boy nodded. I tucked him in
And went to my corner of darkness, comforted
The patient owl that sang my son to sleep
Was not the owl I dread, not mine, but his,
The kind prophet of a strange new wilderness.

—Daniel Mark Epstein

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Wounded life

You, downcast, sitting on your bed,
painting your nails, and saying
to me, "I did this for you . . ."

And I, wondering at your words,
uncomprehending, yet moved
by a silent witness in the room.

I see you now in that very place,
your clothing heaped at random,
your head lowered, reading perhaps
from one of your common books
a story that if one had known how
might have been better told.

Understand that we either grow
or die—die inwardly of that
unlived life we carry within us
like a leaden shadow,
a possibility in thought corrupted.

And of each of us will remain
mostly an image in someone's mind:
a brief light in the summer
darkness, a remembered gesture
like a single unfastened button.

1992

—John Haines

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Orpheus

She has gone back down the way of blood,
the way of earth and slime,
where the stones are slick,
with nothing but footfalls and echoes,
water trickling in the darkness.
Whatever can be spoken in the hereafter
becomes this silence, this absence.

To carry the dead and the loved,
the lost and bewildered,
through life and death in life,
was your assigned calamity.

To bear one's stricken self for sixty years
is harder still. From looking back,
the heart censures its own conduct,
sees its habitation become
a tilted stone ringed with iron,
and a barking dog at the gate.

Orpheus is dead, his bones a playground
for flies and foraging voles.
Now, in the absence of any singing god,
let that other voice begin:

be it bellow, scream, or roar;
the plain music of crystal breaking,
chirp of frogs, thrash of leaves
in the twilight, mutter of sea-waves . . .

The unrehearsed, deliberate artifice,
older, deeper, and more lasting.

1980–94

—John Haines

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Letter from Paris

The barbarian within

by Stephen Sartarelli

As one approaches Paris by train from the south, and probably from any other direction, even the most cursory glance out the window will inevitably fall upon the seemingly endless stream of "tags"—i.e., names and nicknames in colorful, stylized graffiti—adorning the retaining walls that line the railway's path through the gloomy *banlieues* and into the city of lights. The broad cultural range of the names themselves—which during my passage included OTELO 93, MALIK, and ALI as well as the somewhat more Gallic FILOU and DÉDÉ DREAMER—bears eloquent witness to a changing social landscape. Yet perhaps the most striking thing about this graffiti is its unmistakably American character, both in its content (i.e., names) and in the style of its swirling, sometimes illegible lettering. This Americanness seems all the more pronounced by the fact that until lately French graffiti, like graffiti in the rest of Europe, clearly distinguished itself from the American variety by its naked directness and its almost exclusively political content.

Another manifestation, perhaps, of what former Minister of Culture Jack Lang called American "cultural imperialism"? Would that it were so simple: in fact it serves as a splendid example of the profoundly ambivalent and contradictory feelings of the French toward what they see as an ever invasive force, for which they sometimes simply cannot resist rolling out the red carpet. Indeed, following the successes of Jean-Michel Basquiat and other American "graffitists" on the Continental gallery scene in the late 1980s, Jack Lang himself invited some of their number to Paris as guests of the government, in but one of the many eventful moments in his sweeping and controversial expansion of state-funded arts programs. One rationale for this gesture was, of course, to get graffiti off the streets and into the galleries, for American-style "tag" graffiti was already beginning to fill the subways and alleyways. But to judge by the now Bronxian density of the sprayings that have turned many Parisian walls into palimpsests of silly self-expression, it would appear that Lang has, on the contrary, succeeded in inspiring a whole new generation of "outsiders" to cover the otherwise monochrome *faubourgs* with their names and cartoonish emblems in search of some sort of fleeting, one might say Warholian, glory.

Since then, Lang's successor, Jacques Toubon, has managed to rekindle the long smoldering firestorm surrounding *Franglais* and the general use of English (especially its American strain) in commercial and intellectual discourse. In late February he proposed the controversial "*loi Toubon*," which is really nothing more than a resuscitation of a failed Giscard d'Estaing policy from the Seventies. The list of proscriptions is a familiar one, with a few new twists. *En bref*: no foreign terms in advertising; all work contracts, job offers, etc., must be in French; academic and scientific conferences and publications must

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be in French. Violators are to be administered punishments ranging from stiff fines to revocation of all government subsidies.

It must be admitted that some curious things are happening in the day-to-day use of the French language. For example, in certain cases, one hears expressions of English derivation being used with increasing frequency in place of their perfectly serviceable French equivalents: e.g., "*stopper*" instead of *arrêter*; "*réaliser*" instead of *se rendre compte* or *s'apercevoir* (a usage which would have been unacceptable even fifteen years ago); "*test*" instead of *épreuve*; and so on. One could cite some even more absurd examples, such as "*le crash*" of an airplane, or its still sillier verb form, "*crasher*," pronounced just like *cracher*, which means "to spit."

The blame for this unsavory linguistic stew is laid largely at the feet of popular mass culture, especially *la pub*.[1] Yet even assuming it were possible to enforce such a code as Toubon's in advertising and scholarship—which is highly unlikely in both cases, since in the first, far too many mass-market products are "American" by nature if not by origin, and in the second, it would be self-defeating to deprive one's country's specialists of their medium of international communication—how could a government, short of resorting to severe and violent repression, ever hope to legislate the words used in everyday conversation? A language is a living organism, and people are always adopting new formulations and discarding the old to suit what they perceive (rightly or wrongly) as their expressive needs. Few would dispute, for example, that the English language has gained immensely from the varied influx of terms and idioms from Latin, Norman-French, Renaissance Italian, and other sources during the course of its formation.

But can one possibly compare the rapid explosion of Americanisms within the languages of most advanced industrial countries since World War II—a fact probably more attributable to America's early lead in communications and entertainment technology and to the nature of that technology itself than to any real project of cultural dominion—to the far more gradual process whereby all languages have to varying degrees absorbed foreign locutions as a natural part of their historical development? "*C'est cool, ton look*," after all, carries hardly the same cultural charge as an elegant Italianism in Shakespeare or a discreet Gallicism in Eliot; it is far more comparable, in fact, to the infiltration of the latest "surf talk" or street expression into everyday journalistic English within our own national boundaries. In each case the new expression, aided by contemporary technology, rushes to fill the linguistic vacuum of the popular sensibility. In this light, then, it would seem that the pop-cultural mindlessness blamed by some in France—and to a lesser extent in England, Germany, Japan, and elsewhere—on the negative influence of American culture is actually the fruit of an erosion of educational rigor and modes of general discourse similar to that so painfully palpable in the present-day United States.

But if this is so, why is France so quick to point the finger at America whenever the problem comes under discussion? There are, I think, a number of reasons for this. The first is the mere fact of the worldwide linguistic dominance of (American) English, coupled with what I can only call the unelastic, crystalline fragility of a language so long codified as French. It is in fact curious to note that in countries like Italy and Germany, whose national tongues had not really been codified until the advent of the modern age and whose dialects are still very much alive, there is far less objection to the absorption of English into the contemporary language, even though this would appear to be every bit as widespread in those countries as in France. French, on the other hand, which in its correct form still retains a classical simplicity and clarity dependent on strict application of its rules, seems to creak and strain with the addition of extraneous elements. This purity is no doubt one of the

1 French slang for *la publicité* (advertising).

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language's historic strengths, but it probably is also what once prompted Swinburne to call it a "flimsy" tongue, and E. M. Cioran, the Romanian-born aphorist who uses French to such brilliant, "classical" effect, to refer to it as a "dead language."

Another reason for the French sense of alarm is the same unreconciled ambivalence toward things American alluded to above, combined with a new sense of cultural conservatism, shared even by some of the Left. They want to be open to the predominant American attitude that is almost exclusively forward-looking—after all, in many ways France is, or used to be, the cradle of modern Western civilization—and yet they also want to continue to explore, understand, and preserve the immensely rich past. One way in which this latter tendency has lately found positive expression is in the recent, successful trend of publishing or republishing important but somewhat neglected authors from the past (and not necessarily the French past). What was initially a risky move by a number of small houses has become a general trend that has, moreover, enjoyed the massive support of the mainstream press. Thus in just the last two months the curious, intelligent reader has been able to take his pick of new editions of the work of authors old and modern such as Joseph de Maistre, Thomas De Quincey, C. E. Gadda, Emmanuel Bove, Joseph Delteil, and others. The American reader can only sigh and, lamenting perhaps the vastly different market considerations at work, wish that U.S. publishers would take a few more chances of this sort.

One final reason for this casting of blame lies in a reluctance or inability of the French to acknowledge their own role in the above-mentioned erosion of the general modes of intellectual discourse. Indeed, the contemporary French style of writing or speech that best lends itself to the adoption of *Franglais* is that same fragmented, slangy diction popularized by '68 intellectuals and adopted by some of *la nouvelle critique* and now ubiquitous in certain kinds of journalism, film, advertising, fiction, and artspeak: it features a systematic avoidance of complete sentences, excessive ambiguity, rapid-fire sequences of assertions, and the reduction of all manner of expression—art, slogans, news—to the same aesthetically and morally neutral level of "signification" and "language." The voices from these precincts, of course, tend to scoff at such tantrums as the *loi Toubon*, but it would be a mistake to think that these two contrary cultural attitudes do not often coexist within one same mind. Witness, again, Monsieur Lang. This may at least demonstrate, if not explain, how a country that lionizes the likes of Sylvester Stallone or Charles Bukowski—to the point where even so conservative an institution as *Le Figaro* (which openly supported the *loi Toubon*) gushes with praise and sorrow over the recent passing of "*le clochard céleste*" (their appellation)—could also complain about the indubitably distasteful effects of the lowbrow American culture inundating their shores. It's a question of choosing one's poison oneself.

There are, in any case, some signs here of an awareness of the equally internal and international nature of the problems plaguing contemporary cultural debate. A case in point: a young cultural critic named Jean-Philippe Domecq, who for three years has been writing for the venerable intellectual review *Esprit*, earlier this year published a book of essays entitled *Artistes sans art?* (Editions Esprit, Paris) in which he confronts, head-on, the contemporary art and art-critical establishment, the premises of conceptual art, contemporary icons such as Warhol and Boltanski, and even such sacred cows as Picasso and Dubuffet. Now clearly a few of his arguments are debatable, perhaps even wrong, and he enters into a bit too much detail about certain figures probably not really deserving of attention; but his ideas are nothing if not thought-provoking and challenging. What did he get for his efforts? Domecq, who even defines himself as a "progressivist" with Liberal Left leanings, was heaped with scorn and derision by *Le Monde* and was generally called a reactionary

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and philistine; his plight resembled that of Morley Safer when, last September, his mischievous "60 Minutes" segment sent up much the same milieu. What did Domecq say to ruffle so many feathers? Here is a little sampling:

> Even today, it remains very difficult to talk about the art of the closing century if one chooses to appraise it as much on the basis of the works themselves as on their intentions, and no longer exclusively on the basis of the latter. The task of sorting things out between the theoretical intentions and the works that have issued therefrom has, it appears, become *culturally incorrect*. Incorrect according to those currently carrying on the discussion of contemporary art. It is still as though aesthetic judgment had no right to free inquiry except within the prescribed ideological limits: prescribed, that is, by the theoreticians, and artist-theoreticians. Outside of these prescriptions, one is literally impertinent: classified as outside of modernity, thus disqualified, by an argumentative rhetoric somewhat reminiscent of that used by one totalitarian ideology or another to call any dissident voices reactionary.

Domecq's next book, entitled *Le pari littéraire* and due out soon, promises to examine the literary scene. Obviously any effort made to apply firm judgments of value to the mediocre and interminable morass of contemporary culture is not going to win too many new friends. The lower the general standard of judgment falls, the more dogged the resistance to all judgment will naturally be. Some things are, after all, universal.

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Art

Matthiasdottir in full color

by Jed Perl

In her self-portraits Louisa Matthiasdottir stands ramrod straight, head turned slightly to one side, often with her hands resting on her hips. She's seventy-seven now, and, with her terrific bone structure, straight white hair, and blue eyes, she's a wonderful portrait subject. She often paints herself at the center of a fairly large canvas, and she obviously enjoys the narcissistic rush that comes with putting herself in the kind of big portrait that was once reserved for the titled and the rich. Her portraits aren't about lording it over us, but they're not about leveling with us, either. In the self-portraits Matthiasdottir stands in the clear light of day: the luminous gray-blue air is a perfect medium in which to see the pinks of her skin, the brilliant stripes of a sweater, a green pair of shoes, her whole elegant-bohemian look. Matthiasdottir paints herself as an important person. She is so spare and ascetic-looking a figure—and she has such a gift for broad, lucid, unfussy paint handling—that the ultimate effect is of grandness without grandiosity.

Two of the five self-portraits that were in her show at the Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in March are extraordinary; their laconic titles are *Self-Portrait with Red Sweater* and *Self-Portrait with Green Shoes*. These two paintings, along with the five still lifes in the show, didn't exhaust what Matthiasdottir had to offer—there were also five plaster busts and two landscapes, one mural-size—but it was the two self-portraits and the five still lifes that gave her show its weight and expansiveness. Matthiasdottir is one of the most important artists at work today; few even come close to her sense of interval, volume, and color weight. Her color is the fullest color that we're seeing in the galleries right now. She gives old themes a matter-of-fact modernity, and she does it without recourse to conventional ideas about what is traditional and what is contemporary. The best paintings look effortlessly new. That a still life must be absolutely real and absolutely abstract is apparently so obvious to Matthiasdottir that she wouldn't want to bore us by demonstrating how it's done. She's put it all together, and we are left with the complicated, pearly, seamless radiance of the work. There are quite a few artists in New York today who paint very good still lifes; a major painter helps us to understand what the others are doing, and so far as still life is concerned, Louisa Matthiasdottir provides the working definitions. So far as self-portrait is concerned there is no one else in competition: Matthiasdottir stands alone.

To make a rectangle of canvas mean as much as Matthiasdottir does is to work magic, and like all artists who know how to convince us that the feeling is in the form, Matthiasdottir has a sense of humor and a sense of play. I presume that she paints her self-portraits looking in the mirror, but interestingly she does not represent herself in the act of painting. These self-portraits without brush, palette, or easel are not

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about a painter at work but about a painter reimagined as an individual who can be in a painting. Painting herself full-length, unencumbered by brush or easel, Matthiasdottir creates a fictional world that she finds livable. There's a wonderful element of theater in these self-portraits. Matthiasdottir sees portraiture as associated with the theatricality of personality, something we know from the Baroque masters. There are modern artists, among them de Chirico in his late portraits, who have drawn on the theatricality of the Baroque to achieve an overripe comic tone. Matthiasdottir's connection to the Baroque is more intuitive; it comes out in the almost sneakily comic way that she has of presenting herself as director, set designer, and star all rolled into one. The self-portraits are about Matthiasdottir romancing Matthiasdottir. And her straightforward, absolutely unflamboyant demeanor makes the egotism all the more elusive and interesting. Though Matthiasdottir's expression is invariably a little grave, these are wonderfully happy paintings. Matthiasdottir is where she wants to be. She's in the painting, looking out at us.

Some portraitists make us believe that a person's deepest emotions are inscribed on the face, if only we can read the signs. It's a view with which Matthiasdottir apparently does not concur, at least where her own face is concerned. Still, she has a way of getting at psychological truth, which has to do with showing us not what she knows about herself but what she knows we know about her. In her portraits she is taking her place in the world. The poet John Ashbery has written of her self-portraits, "She will pose in a trench coat and holding a closed umbrella, as stiffly as those eighteenth-century French prints representing various *petits métiers*— . . . it's the artist preparing to go outside." The self-portraits suggest what a person can and can't see of another person; they get at the familiar feeling of being absolutely in the world and yet not really known or understood in the world. Matthiasdottir expresses this paradox formally, in terms of a tension between the forthrightness of her stance and the elusiveness of her face. In the paintings it's a contrast—a disjuncture—that we experience through different kinds of contours, different ways of handling paint and color. In the body everything is crisp edges, decisive planes of color; in the face the contours are often smudged and the contrasts are often reduced. I know I'm making this sound programmatic, diagrammatic. In some cases (including the very weak self-portrait inexplicably used for the announcement of the Salander-O'Reilly show) Matthiasdottir puts no features on the face, a withholding of information that, whatever the reason she may have, does feel contrived and formulaic. But in the best self-portraits, the unclearness within the clearness is true to something that everybody probably experiences, namely the idea that a person's purely physical presence has a lot to tell us about the mysteries of personality. There is much information that the portrait painter cannot give us: there is no conversation, we do not hear the sound of a voice. But we do look into the eyes, and Matthiasdottir never underestimates their importance (what sensible artist would?). In the portrait in the red sweater, where the face is fascinatingly vague, the pupils are all the way to one side and from that at-an-angle vantage point the artist evasively returns the viewer's glance. The electricity of the painting is in that exchange of glances, an exchange that breaks the artist out of the self-containment of the painting that she has painted.

In the Salander-O'Reilly show there were two self-portraits in each of the two big rooms, so the artist was right there, keeping an eye on us as we looked at the show. The second-floor galleries at Salander-O'Reilly are elegant, high, beautifully proportioned old rooms, and Matthiasdottir's work fit them ideally. Almost all the work was recent, often from the past few months. The west wall in the front room facing on Seventy-ninth Street, where the *Self-Portrait with Red Sweater* hung next to the *Still Life with Blue Tablecloth and Green Table*, was spellbinding.

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What first impresses a gallery-goer about the still lifes is the overall orchestration of the colors. These orchestrations vary greatly from painting to painting. There are compositions that are like ascending color scales, going from purplish gray to yellowish blue, and there are other paintings that are deliberately strident, like crazy quilts of oranges, greens, reds. Then, almost before one has had time to take in this overall effect, each object begins to shine forth with its own unique colors; the heavy green of a painted table, the apple green of a plate, the maroonish purple of wine vinegar in a jar, the light yellow of a grapefruit, the deep red of what look like peppers in a jar. A zucchini or a melon can, for a moment, seem to be a mere shape, but it's also a color shape that is related to other color shapes with such precision that it somehow retains its own absolute integrity. Matthiasdottir knows how to bring out the individuality of objects in a number of ways, not just as color shapes but also as complex forms. She catches the variety of light reflections that complicate a form even as they articulate it. In many of the still lifes in this show Matthiasdottir locates the point of naturalistic focus toward the back of the painting, in an object perched at the upper left of the shelf that runs at the back of the green table on which she arranges the majority of her still lifes. Up there we discover a little rosy-toned glass pitcher or that bottle full of dark purple vinegar. The summary exactness of the painting of some of these objects is breathtaking and a little unnerving. The small violation of naturalistic logic that's involved in the clearest object also being the farthest away gives the compositions a delicious air of antinaturalistic possibility. Matthiasdottir refuses to bring a whole painting to the same level of focus; she knows it would be unbearable to look at—overfocused, too tight. And so from those heights of illusionism she sends us off to other objects, which may be painted with little or no surface specifics. The shifts in and out of focus and the contrasts between the architectural and the atmospheric that we see in the still lifes are related to Matthiasdottir's work in the self-portraits.

Matthiasdottir is the most intellectual of painters, but she regards her own intellectuality not as an attitude that she brings to experience but as an inevitable, almost involuntary, outgrowth of her need to know everything about the things that she puts into her paintings. Her essential subject, which she approaches with the open mind of an empiricist, is the geometry of everyday life. She can express her interest in geometry rather bluntly, in the way she arranges her still life objects in, say, a diamond configuration on the table, so that they inscribe a four-sided shape inside the rectangle of the canvas, but perhaps she did this more often in the still lifes of a decade ago than in the ones she's doing now. There's an impressively haphazard quality to the arrangement of the objects in some of the recent still lifes (and it's a very different haphazardness than in her still lifes of the 1950s or 1960s, when she jumbled things together into one large mass). Geometry is no longer an imposed order so much as it's an internal order, an order that we understand through the experience of handling and using things. In some of the recent still lifes objects seem just placed here and there—as if they'd been set down on the countertop in the kitchen without much thought. Yet there's geometry inherent in the objects. Two plump zucchinis, aimed in different directions, become the longitude and latitude of a tabletop. In the *Still Life with Green Table and Blue Cloth* there's a whole grapefruit, a grapefruit half, and a knife, and together these simplest of objects unfold a drama of transformations in which black turns yellow pink, meaning that the black knife has cut through a whole grapefruit to reveal its insides. The plane cuts the sphere to reveal the circle. Matthiasdottir doesn't explode ordinary objects, she just opens up their possibilities, and the decisiveness of her paint handling, which weaves together simplification and complication, makes the multiplicity of meanings seem natural, inevitable. With a tablecloth she can do anything. Pulled tight, the

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cloth sets up a space as orderly as a Quattrocento piazza. Rumpled, as in the *Still Life with Blue and White Tablecloth*, it's the world in confusion, with space collapsing in on itself and objects teetering on the brink of oblivion.

The still lifes and the best of the self-portraits were what gave this show its magisterial sophistication. The plaster heads (most of which were done in the early 1960s) had a breadth of feeling and an easy skillfulness that was related to the elegance of Matthiasdottir's brushwork, and a show of these portrait sculptures would have been an event in itself, but in the context of the still lifes and self-portraits, they furnished little more than a fascinating backdrop. The landscapes were far from Matthiasdottir's best. She painted some spectacular ones in the years around 1980, but the energy appears to have gone out of that side of her work some time ago. I was glad, however, to see the huge four-part landscape, 240 inches long, painted in 1985. By comparison with the still lifes it's schematic and arbitrary-feeling, but judged as decoration rather than as painting it has a certain expansiveness, and this suggests that Matthiasdottir could perhaps do something interesting if given the chance to design large-scale mosaics or tapestries, the sort of thing that Léger did late in his life.

In spite of some less-than-marvelous works, this was one of those rare one-person shows in which there are many high points to choose from. Matthiasdottir's best paintings have such a strong internal logic that when you're looking at them you accept them on faith and hardly give a thought to how exactly they came to be. Only later on do you begin to wonder how the artist pulled it off, or think of trying to place the particular complexity of her current still lifes and self-portraits in the context of her earlier work.

A useful small overview of Matthiasdottir's career—it's the first so far as I know—was published last summer in Iceland on the occasion of an exhibition of her work in Reykjavik, the city where she was born and to which she still makes regular visits. Although Matthiasdottir's is a New York career, she has retained strong ties to Iceland—it is the subject of the majority of her landscapes—and one gathers that she is now regarded as the country's most important painter. This elegantly produced little catalogue contains some very good reproductions ranging over much of the career, and they clarify Matthiasdottir's shift from tonal color to a more vibrant palette sometime in the 1970s, as well as a concomitant clarification in the brushwork, which has moved from overlays of brushstrokes to increasingly summary, streamlined effects. There is also consistency. The earliest painting reproduced in the Reykjavik catalogue, a study of a boy bent over a toy, painted in 1939 when she was twenty-two, has a broadness and confidence of handling that isn't entirely different from what we see in her work today.

I suppose Matthiasdottir is like any other ambitious Icelander in that she has had to travel in order to avail herself of the best possible education. In 1934, when she was seventeen, she went to Copenhagen to study; in the winter of 1938–39 she was in Paris studying with Marcel Gromaire. The coming of war forced her back to Iceland, from where she went to America, and enrolled in the Hofmann School; New York has been home base ever since. I have the impression that neither Gromaire nor Hofmann was a defining experience for Matthiasdottir, so much as their studios gave her entrée to art centers that she found of use. There is much in Matthiasdottir's work that can be related to Hofmann's ideas, but the extent to which she is a Hofmann student is probably less important than the extent to which she is a product of the community of artists that grew up around the Hofmann School in the years after the war. The idea that the vitality of an artist's brushwork expresses the vitality of life was an idea that Hofmann had taken, in any event, from Paris; in the 1950s, it could seem to the New Yorkers that that vitality was dying in Paris and being reborn in New York. In the work

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of Matthiasdottir and other painters in the Hofmann sphere, such as Nell Blaine and the late Robert De Niro, an old Parisian elision between lively brushwork and the liveliness of life was sustained—they're among the ones who in some sense never stopped looking at the still lifes and figures that Hofmann had set before his students. But of all the artists who came out of that particular moment, Matthiasdottir has had the most self-critical and expansive relationship to the idea of painterliness. De Niro remained to the end the same figurative expressionist he'd been in 1950; his good paintings are, conceptually speaking, all equal. Blaine has sharpened the focus of her work immeasurably since the 1950s—her flower paintings and still lifes can be rapturous, complete experiences—yet her brushstrokes remain basically the same dancing marks they were in the 1960s. Only Matthiasdottir has allowed her structural investigations to transform her style. At times, she's followed the internal logic of a painting all the way to the point where the brushstroke vanishes into the completeness of an illusion. Yet she has never rejected painterliness. Quite the contrary, she has taken painterliness further than any other artist of her generation.

In the Reykjavik catalogue I count more than two dozen one-woman shows, between 1948 at the Jane Street Gallery and Salander-O'Reilly in March 1994. This was Matthiasdottir's first show at Salander-O'Reilly, and some of us could not help thinking, as we stood there, of all the times that we had stood at the Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, where Matthiasdottir had more than a dozen shows after joining the gallery in 1964. There were other reasons to be thinking about Robert Schoelkopf and his gallery in March, for a gallery-goer with a bit of a memory would have noticed that three artists—Matthiasdottir, William Bailey, and Gabriel Laderman—were doing something they'd never done before, having simultaneous exhibits in New York City. Before Schoelkopf died of leukemia in 1992 this would have been impossible, for the simple reason that all three of them were showing with Schoelkopf, an establishment that made an essential contribution to our understanding not only of contemporary painting but also of photography and of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American art. For some of us the Robert Schoelkopf Gallery was one of the places where, in the early Seventies, we discovered what gallery-going was all about. Matthiasdottir's work was a part of that discovery, and continuing to look at her work we discovered more and more, and never more than in 1980, when she had the show at Schoelkopf in which her full-color style came completely into focus. Now, fourteen years later, the paintings are hanging a dozen blocks farther uptown, and the still lifes are better than ever. There have been Matthiasdottir shows in recent years where the mundane landscapes overwhelmed everything else and her work looked underdone, perfunctory, blandly straightforward. This time around, however, she's unbeatable. She knows everything she needs to know, and this knowledge is sunk deep, deep in every inch of her best canvases. Matthiasdottir plumbs the depths and lays her discoveries right out there on the surface for all to see. The result is this amazing lucidity, a lucidity that is nothing less than self-confidence reimagined as a formal value.

Exhibition notes

"Richard Avedon: Evidence, 1944–1994"
at the Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York. March 23–June 26, 1994

In a culture that deems the celebrity snaps of Annie Leibovitz worthy of a multi-city, international retrospective, it should come as no surprise to find Richard Avedon regarded as an Old Master. The Whitney Museum's "Evidence, 1944–1994" is the photographer's second retrospective at a major New York museum, the first having taken place at the Metropolitan just over fifteen years ago.

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It seems that the kind of photography of which Avedon really *is* a master—fashion work of the sort done for *Harper's Bazaar* in the Forties and Fifties, which yielded icons such as his *Dovima with Elephants*—now embarrasses him, for it is absent from the show. This has allowed Avedon to reinvent himself, to liquidate Avedon the fashion photographer and to re-emerge as Avedon the hard-boiled but tender-hearted social documentarian. Hence the show's pretentious title. Avedon wants to be seen as a photographer on the front lines, holding up this "evidence" to tell us who we really are.

Thus we have Avedon's pictures of the psychiatric ward, the civil-rights struggle, Vietnam, the Chicago Seven, the contemporary American West, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall. It's the path of an artist uncomfortable with bourgeois society's refined taste and sophistication and eager to hop on the counterculture's bandwagon of "relevance" and social concern.

But Avedon's efforts at a reinvention of self fail; these photographs are empty and flat. Avedon has always gotten his best results in the confined and tightly controlled environment of the studio, where he can stage dynamic and highly stylized theatrical events; turn him loose on the street, with its openness and unpredictability, and he's at a loss. The pictures shot at the Brandenburg Gate in 1989 are an embarrassment. Most look as if Avedon had never held a camera before. And, tellingly, when Avedon took his camera into the street on the evening of November 22, 1963, he posed randomly selected passers-by with copies of the newspaper bannering word of JFK's assassination. They are thus a hybrid: part Wegee, part Avedon studio shot.

Another problem is that Avedon possesses neither the talent nor the temperament to be a chronicler of humanity. He can't connect with his fellow man. His portraits rarely get beyond surfaces. Indeed, they work best when they unabashedly make surfaces their subject, as in the shot of Andy Warhol's scarred abdomen. It's a hipper, more in-your-face version of the early fashion shots, the individual as object rather than as vessel of personality.

Then again, Avedon's vision of his fellow man is warped by the disfiguring lens of his own animus. An undercurrent of Avedon's early work is a fascination with the unusual, even the grotesque (see his 1959 photographs of the decayed corpses in the Palermo catacombs). But instead of remaining an undercurrent, a kind of wicked, occasional indulgence, an understandable antidote to the rarified world of high fashion, this fascination has over the years become the main current, sweeping away everything else in Avedon's aesthetic. Avedon isn't after deep human insights. He wants to expose—even revel in—the foibles and frailties and latent grotesqueness of every one of his subjects. Not even Alexey Brodovitch, his teacher and mentor, is spared Avedon's arrogant cruelty. He is shown in a 1970 photograph a frail old man barely able to hold himself upright on crutches. But then, in the quest for "evidence," there can be no playing favorites.

But more than anything else, "Evidence" is an exercise in vanity. It's not just the title, the manufactured persona, or the inflated installation with its pointlessly brobdingnagian prints. It's Avedon's determination to trump every other photographer, from Henri Cartier-Bresson to Garry Winogrand to ordinary paparazzi, by "doing" them in his own image. Avedon's professional voracity is such that the show even includes a slightly risqué seaside candid from 1963 of a naked pre-pubescent girl being held aloft by her father, pudenda pointed directly at the camera. Avedon wants to demonstrate his prescient ability to "do" a Sally Mann a generation early.

Avedon's vainglory is apparent in his own intrusive presence in pictures throughout the catalogue: there he is, muscling into photos with his subjects, and there he is again, "witnessing" Vietnam, being arrested at an anti-war demonstration, and heroically shooting a Bloomingdale's catalogue from a sickbed. It is also manifest in his decision to reproduce in facsimile a fan telegram from Jean Cocteau: "THANK YOU YOU TERRIBLE

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AND MARVELOUS MIRROR." "Evidence" isn't an exhibition, it's a publicity stunt. It isn't art, it's ego.

—Eric Gibson

"Petrus Christus:
Renaissance Master of Bruges"
at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York. April 14–July 31, 1994

The Metropolitan Museum is to be congratulated for mounting this fine exhibition—the first ever—of the painting and silverpoint drawings of the Flemish artist Petrus Christus (*c.* 1400–1476). Despite the efforts of Panofsky, Friedlaender, and others, Flemish Renaissance painting has still not received the attention it deserves. The last major show of early Netherlandish painting took place more than thirty years ago. A small handful of artists—notably Jan van Eyck (d. 1441) and Rogier van der Weyden (d. 1465)—are familiar enough, but distinguished followers and contemporaries, such as Petrus Christus, remain little more than names—if that. Organized by Maryan W. Ainsworth, Senior Research Fellow at the Met, this exhibition contains twenty-one paintings and five drawings by Christus—about three-quarters of his known *oeuvre*—and should help to rectify the neglect that his work has suffered.

Born in Baerle, a village in Brabant, in the early 1400s, Petrus Christus came to the bustling, cosmopolitan city of Bruges in 1444, when he purchased citizenship. His earliest extant works date from around 1445. They are deeply influenced by the supersharp delineations of Jan van Eyck. It used to be thought that Christus studied with Jan, but it is now known that he arrived in Bruges too late to have had any direct encounters with the master. Nevertheless, the many copies he made of Jan's work (several of which are included in this exhibition) suggest that he had access to Jan's workshop after his death.

Christus is at his best as a portraitist. The early *Portrait of a Carthusian* (1446), which

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is owned by the Met, is a masterpiece of psychological intimacy and canny lighting effects (or, more precisely, of psychological intimacy rendered through canny lighting effects). Described in the exhibition catalogue as an "homage" to Jan, this three-quarters-view bust-length likeness follows Jan's practice of incorporating a *trompe l'oeil* frame into the canvas in order to heighten the image's aura of reality. Resting on the bottom ledge of the frame is a common housefly, symbol of mortality and further inducement to regard the pictorial space of the painting as *our* space. Standing at an angle in the center of the framed "window," the white-robed lay brother looks out at the viewer from a beckoning reservoir of warm brownish-reds. The painting is a spectacle of humanized spiritual calm and strength.

The other great masterpiece of portraiture is the exhibition's signature image, the mysterious *Portrait of a Lady* (*c.* 1470) from Berlin. Although various names have been put forward, the identity of the sitter is unknown. There is something almost Oriental about the delicate, porcelain beauty of the woman. And though she frankly meets the viewer's eye, a certain reluctance or reserve checks her gaze. In sharp contrast to the *Portrait of a Carthusian*, the painting is a medley of coolnesses: blues offset by crisp whites; the attenuated pale pink of the sitter's lips, pressed primly together but betraying, perhaps, a hint of buried sensuousness; the elegant accoutrements of blacks and golds and gray-browns; the gloomy, half-articulated backdrop. The image possesses a burnished, inward-looking formality. There is nothing on offer here: the space is very much *her* space; the gaze meets ours not in communion but in distant, even wary, regard.

These portraits are perhaps the most memorable images in the exhibition. But Christus's historical importance rests more with his experiments in one-point perspective, the first in Flemish painting. Alberti's *Della Pittura*, the first systematic explanation of the mechanics of one-point perspective, appeared in Florence in 1435. It is not known for certain whether Christus traveled to Italy (little is known about his movements from 1457 to 1463) or knew of Alberti's work directly; but Christus somehow picked up the rudiments of perspectival construction, perhaps from a trip to Italy, perhaps from his Italian clients in Bruges. The exhibition includes several pictures from the late 1450s and 1460s in which we see him struggling to master the technique of organizing an image around a central vanishing point. X-radiographs, reproduced in the exhibition and the catalogue, show where Christus marked the vanishing point with a stylus and how the orthogonals of the pictures tend to converge on it. In his most elaborate canvases—such as *Death of the Virgin* (1460–65)—the handling of perspective has both a certain bravura quality and a certain patchiness: in parts of the painting, the rational construction of space is carefully and consistently worked out; in other parts, it is abandoned altogether. Whether this was simple sloppiness or a deliberate effort on the part of the artist to gesture toward something beyond rationality remains a mystery.

A catalogue for the exhibition, written by Maryan W. Ainsworth, with contributions by Maximilian Martens, has been published by the Met and Harry N. Abrams (232 pages, $60; $45 paper).

—Roger Kimball

"Joseph Stella"
at the Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York. April 22–October 9, 1994

Joseph Stella (1877–1946) has long occupied a secure place in the ranks of the first generation of American modernists. His period of residence in Paris in 1911–12 gave him first-hand access to the art and ideas of the European avant-garde in the halcyon years of its development, and his association with the artists and patrons of the New York Dada group—Marcel Duchamp, Walter and Louise Arensberg, *et al.*—placed him in the company of the American avant-garde as well. Above all, his celebrated paintings of

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the Brooklyn Bridge, produced in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, have long enjoyed an iconic status in the American art of this century.

Yet Stella's has always been a difficult career to keep in focus, and not only because of his frequent shifts in style. The contradictory character of his own temperament was a source of bedevilment in his lifetime, and has continued to be a source of confusion for his posterity. In the work of no other American artist of his generation are there such flagrant contrasts of taste and standards to be observed. Stella was a man of large passions and absolute convictions, but the object of those passions often underwent sudden changes and the focus of his convictions was similarly volatile. In neither his peripatetic life nor his many-sided art did he ever find it possible to follow a steady course. As both a man and an artist he was constantly in search of new attachments.

To make coherent sense of the work that resulted from this remarkable combination of restless ambition and changeable loyalties is no small task. We must therefore be grateful to Barbara Haskell, the curator of the current Stella retrospective at the Whitney, for carrying out this task in an exemplary manner. By dividing this exhibition into what is, in effect, a series of separate mini-retrospectives devoted to each of the styles or themes that excited Stella's enthusiasm, Ms. Haskell has boldly faced up to the contradictions and disjunctions that characterize the artist's *oeuvre*. The result is a very clear account of an artistic development that would otherwise be difficult to follow.

From the first of these mini-retrospectives, which focuses on the artist's early portrait drawings of fellow immigrants on the East Side of New York—Stella had come to America in his late teens from Italy—to the last grouping, which concentrates on the late paintings in Barbados, we are made acutely conscious of the conflicting loyalties that were never to be resolved. In virtually every phase of Stella's variegated work—from drawings of the most astounding delicacy to paintings of the most appalling vulgarity—we are in the presence of an unsettled and unsettling talent. Masterly portraits, audacious Dadaesque collages, overscale Futurist compositions, and religious paintings that are pure kitsch, were all within the artist's range. This is thus an exhibition in which masterpieces are shown, sometimes side by side, with really grotesque failures of taste. It is this mix of the lofty and the lowly that makes this retrospective a definitive account of Stella's art.

—Hilton Kramer

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Theater

Second chances

by Donald Lyons

The revival of *Carousel* is an instance of a phenomenon that seems to date from the 1980s—the English redaction, rethinking, reshuffling of American cultural artifacts from a couple of generations back. On the musical side, there was a *Porgy and Bess* at Glyndebourne, a *Guys and Dolls* at the Royal National Theatre (not the production now in New York), and a *Carmen Jones* at the Old Vic; there is a *Pal Joey* now in the works in London. On the dramatic side, attempts have regularly been made to resuscitate minor Williams like *Orpheus Descending*. The tack generally is to claim to be deglamorizing and deprettifying a work whose revelation of the horrors of American life has been obscured by the passage of time and, more sinisterly, by the forces of conformity.

Something of this sort clearly inspired Nicholas Hytner, the youngish director of *Miss Saigon*, to take a look at *Carousel*, the 1945 musical with which Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein followed up their first collaboration, *Oklahoma!* (1943). *Carousel* goes back, via an American stage adaptation first put on in the 1920s, to *Liliom* (1909), a Ferenč Molnár play about a ne'er-do-well given an extra day after death to repair some of the mischief done in his lifetime, especially to his long-suffering wife. The popular stage fantasy had been filmed more than once, most recently in 1934 by Fritz Lang, with Charles Boyer as Liliom and, way down in the credits, Antonin Artaud as the Knife Grinder. It is a pleasing fable, full of boulevard pessimism, about the power of sexual attraction to override prudence, the power of forgiveness to overcome hurt, and man's impotence before fate. It gave Rodgers and Hammerstein what they did not always have—a clear and involving narrative line. They set the story in a turn-of-the-century coastal New England mill town; Mr. Hytner and set designer Bob Crowley seize on the class-oppression background aspect of the story at the very start of their production, now come from London to the Vivian Beaumont. Beneath a huge clock, eight women work at a great warp, as if in a Dreiser story. The great round and revolving stage at the Beaumont (never better used) is in constant metamorphosis during this *Carousel*: the mill turns into a fairground, where the young women, liberated from work, go to watch Billy Bigelow run the carousel, and then into a hill overlooking the town late at night, where nice girl Julie Jordan and bad boy Billy circle warily around their dawning attraction, to "If I Loved You"—sung with the emphasis on that tentative "if."

But the really telling service Hytner does *Carousel* is not the imposition of a class edge—that comes and goes fitfully, anyway—but the casting of it with an eye to dramatic excitement. No big voices, but sexy, tense performers: Michael Hayden, a Juilliard drama graduate, as Billy, and Sally Murphy, a Steppenwolf performer who was Rose of Sharon in the dramatized *Grapes of*

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Wrath, as Julie. Both act the characters' raw emotions and do the songs as dramatic expression of individual feeling rather than as set pieces to croon or belt. Hayden keeps Billy stupid, angry, violent, mixed-up; he is no sentimentalized ruffian. Murphy makes Julie lovable and sane, steering the character, who does not stop loving even when she comes to see the truth about Billy, away from masochism. Her song "What's the Use of Wond'rin' [if he's good or if he's bad]" is profoundly moving as an expression of the irrational tug of eros—Eros Turannos, as the wonderful poem of E. A. Robinson, also set on the Maine coast, has it. This sexual electricity acted and sung between the leads is the real heart of the show. When Billy gets to sing his famous "soliloquy" on the impending joys of fatherhood, Hayden makes it a troubled man's dream of normalcy; the daydream is Billy's, not Rodgers and Hammerstein's.

When Billy kills himself in the aftermath of a bungled robbery, Julie says, "You were bad, quick-tempered and unhappy; I knew why you hit me. . . . I'll tell you now, I love you." She and the show's wise voice, Nettie, then give us "You'll Never Walk Alone" as a hymn to the value of community in assuaging grief. With opera soprano Shirley Verrett's large voice and rigid presence to enlarge the already-acted dramatic base of the situation, the scene builds beautifully. But, of course, the tale is far from over: Billy, in a sort of purgatory, gets a chance to return to earth fifteen years later to do a good deed and thereby escape the fires of hell. What he sees down there is his daughter, Louise, being seduced by a sexy Fairground Boy much as her mother once was by him. This seduction is in the form of a ballet, choreographed in the original by Agnes de Mille and rechoreographed here by Kenneth Macmillan in a staging completed, after Sir Kenneth's death, by Jane Elliott. As danced with gusto and juice by handsome Jon Marshall Sharp and lovely Sandra Brown—both trained dancers as the leads are not, and do not have to be, trained singers—the ballet shows the second generation in the process of recapitulating the tragedy of the first (it's like the end of *Wuthering Heights* in this respect).

Louise is at first a spunkily energetic tomboy we see playing baseball with the guys; courted by a local nice rich boy, she thinks good guys dull and bad guys sexy. And pronto, in the ruins of the very carousel her long-dead dad once operated, Louise enacts a surrender to a Bad Boy: lots of tight lifts, underarm carries, slidings between legs. The two young dancers convey all the sweet danger and rapture of wild young attraction. It always was an inspired piece of artistic daring to have pure dance do this key narrative work in a musical; here Macmillan, in a glorious farewell coda to his doomed-lover signature pieces, goes the earlier production one better by doing the job within the vocabulary of classical dance. The whole moment is a lovely example of two arts cooperating with courtesy and without condescension.

After this dance, Billy tries to offer the daughter he never knew a "star" as a magic prophylaxis; she refuses; he hits her; all seem trapped in the past's destructive patterns. But Rodgers and Hammerstein will not let go. They offer two modes of redemption, of liberation, not found in the Budapest of *Liliom*: Billy goes to Louise's high-school graduation and hears a speaker urge the graduates to stand on their own two feet and not be bound by their parents' mistakes; Billy reprises "If I Loved You" and the company (at the graduation) reprises "You'll Never Walk Alone." If the school speech is Rodgers and Hammerstein in a simplistically sunny and meliorist tone—a tone amply represented elsewhere in *Carousel* by "June Is Bustin' Out All Over" and "A Real Nice Clambake"—the returning music at the end is something much more, something deeper. It puts into art the mysterious, ambiguous force of love and the improving drives present in life in America.

Mr. Hytner, then, does deploy his melancholy sets—half Douanier Rousseau, half Edward Hopper—superbly, but agitprop is soon forgotten. They serve *Carousel*; not

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Carousel them. Secondary performers—some black, some white, so what—are fine, in such one-dimensional roles as nice, prudent best friend Carrie (Audra Ann McDonald) and menacing macho thug Jigger (Fisher Stevens).

Rodgers and Hammerstein were limited artists, sneered at in their heyday and since for depriving the musical of its old 1930s wit and impudence and for preaching social uplift and buck-up self-help. Much of this is not a bum rap, but in *Carousel*, surely their masterpiece, their very vices become virtues. The bigness and embracingness of their feeling seem to well up from the story and the characters; the healing philosophy is balanced by fidelity to a grim tale.

Just when drama lovers thought they wouldn't have Frank Rich to kick around anymore, he having forsaken the *Times* theater beat and moved up to writing about Tonya Rodham Bobbitt on the op-ed page, he suddenly devoted a column to *Carousel*, or rather to an absurd version of the history of *Carousel*: it seems that, created in the 1940s "to depict an America haunted by inequities and suffering," the true *Carousel* was "bowdlerized" in the evil 1950s, "a decade whose rigid dogma was sexless suburban family bliss." Now at last we live in a glorious new age, though, and the wraps are off *Carousel*; this new production makes us realize that "it is up to us to break this country's unending cycles of social injustice and domestic violence." The humorless, fellow-traveling didacticism of this is worthy of the old *P.M.*; right up to date, however, is the nastiness about "family bliss" and the reduction of the work to an alarm over "domestic violence" (he forgets there's sexual harassment in it, too). In this spirit, *Oedipus Rex* can be construed as a warning about traffic safety.

Clifford Odets's last play, *The Flowering Peach*, the story of Noah and of Noah's difficult family life, opened on Broadway in December of 1954. The great donnée—God is going to destroy the world and made these curious arrangements to preserve the human and animal species—looms above the play, which takes place at the foot of and aboard the ark, but is not what the play is about. What we get is the family drama of a father wrestling with an angry, rebellious son whom he loves more than he does his obedient, materialistic, successful son. This scenario, or some variant thereof, was very much in the air in those times: think of John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952) and Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). The man who directed the film of the former and the stage première of the latter, Elia Kazan, had himself a tense and unresloved relationship with his father, as he later explained in an autobiography and in autobiographical novels. The *topos* lies unexplored, arguably, in plays like *Death of a Salesman* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Clearly, the *Gestalt* was both a reality for certain generations of Americans and a construct of the then-ubiquitous Freudianism.

Although Odets was the vanguard of so much in the American theater, it is interesting that his greatest play, *Awake and Sing* (1935), has no traces of this story; nor, indeed, does Williams's first play, *The Glass Menagerie* (1943). Instead, both concentrate on the young son breaking away from the familial embrace to encounter the world—or rather, both create with sad exactness the families being escaped from. (Indeed, as a thoughtful reader once pointed out to me, *Glass Menagerie* is a kind of reworking of the Odets play.)

In *The Flowering Peach*, Japheth, the youngest of Noah's three sons, at first refuses to lend his engineering skills to his father's mad enterprise, saying "Is this vengeful God the very God I was taught to love? I cannot work for such a vengeful God." Noah's reductive retort: "Take a wife." Esther, the maternal bedrock of common sense and love (she's a weak rehash of Bessie in *Awake and Sing*), tries to reconcile her husband and her favorite son. Oldest son Shem sees the flood as a grand commercial opportunity ("The whole world is ours") and advises Japheth to go along: "In unstable times respect for authority must pre-

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vail." Shem has secreted heaps of manure on the ark; Noah, disgusted, cries, "With manure you want to start the new world?"

Then there are the romantic complications: Japheth loves sweet Rachel, wife of middle son Ham, who in turn finds himself drawn to a heart-of-gold strumpet Japheth has rescued. Japheth, who has said, "I'd rather die in protest than live," nevertheless constructs a rudder for the ark but still has to beg his father, "Pop, you have to accept me for what I am, not what you want me to be."

The quality of the endeavor should be clear from all this. Poor Odets had tied himself up in creative knots: on the one hand, he had not the kind of imagination that could rise to the bizarre strangeness of the tale; on the other, the tale confined his native naturalism to a juiceless and generic neverwhere. The whole idea of the Noah family's practical problems probably belongs to the realm of comedy, anyway; it is more Mel Brooks than *King Lear*. This script, alas, combines the worst of Brooks with the worst of *Back to Methuselah*, which was at least the product of a mind at home in ideas.

The thinness of the realizing imagination and the flaccidity of the language persist to the end of the play. Dying, Esther announces that "the children's happiness is my promised land." Japheth, disembarking from the ark on a sunny day, surmises that "maybe God changes when men change." Noah, left alone on stage, asks God for "a sign you won't destroy the world again." A rainbow appears, and he speculates that "now it's in man's hands to make or destroy the world." Much was made in 1954 of the relevance of these mildly secularizing remarks to the day's burning issues: the bomb, HUAC, the death of God. Harold Clurman sniffed a sellout ("Is this the beginning of wisdom or an apology for surrender?"), while Eric Bentley saw them as less important than Odets's newfound religiousness ("If religion is to be found, not in creeds and avowals but in reverence for life, in humility before the mystery of things, in a man's spontaneous and pervasive spirituality, then this Noah is a religious man, and so is his author"). These Lawrentian formulas of Bentley's bear witness not to anything really in the play but, I suspect, to a goodwill toward late Odets. In 1954, Odets was widely seen as a burnt-out radical and Hollywood sellout. In fact, much of Odets's Hollywood work—*Deadline at Dawn*, the only movie Harold Clurman ever directed; *Sweet Smell of Success*; *The Big Knife*—is tart and pungent. But it is hard not to agree that the anger of youth was the only fuel that ever really powered Odets. Compare those tepid conclusions of Japheth and Noah to the antireligious rage, in *Awake and Sing*, of Jacob, described in the stage note as "an old Jew with living eyes in his tired face": "So you believe in God . . . you got something for it? . . . Did you found a piece of earth where you could live like a human being and die with the sun on your face? Tell me, yes, tell me. I would like to know myself." This is living language; it moves one even on the page. Was there ever to be anything so good in Arthur Miller? Ah, Odets.

Veteran hands guided the National Actors Theatre revival of *The Flowering Peach*: it was directed by Martin Charnin (a stalwart of the musical theater who had once written a musical version of this play called *Two by Two*) and starred Eli Wallach as Noah and Anne Jackson as Esther. Wallach's way was to plant himself center stage and grouch; Jackson would sidle fearlessly up and grouch right back, both in biblically burlap *schmattas*. The youngsters were functional: David Aaron Baker pouty as Japheth, Joanna Going tender as Rachel, Josh Mostel obnoxious as Shem. It was all as stolid and simple and prosaic as matzoh-ball soup and made me glad I saw the play. Once.

Steven Berkoff has directed *Richard II* for the New York Shakespeare Festival at the Public. He did *Coriolanus* there a while back. This is the first Shakespeare downtown under the George C. Wolfe regime.

Richard II is a very difficult work to put on. As one critic remarks, "it has no prose, no jokes, plenty of rhyme, and blank verse of high quality." Worse, it has heaps of histori-

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cal exposition, numerous dynastic subplots involving unknown characters, and a central personage who is whiningly unsympathetic at best. It needs a tender understanding of its rhetoric and a sincere interest in the great history tetralogy it inaugurates. What it gets here is raped by a preening and self-regarding stylization that makes one long for the return of JoAnne Akalaitis.

I'll try to recapture the disconnected, postmodern quality of this *Richard II* by presenting the notes I took during one Saturday-afternoon performance. Cynics will doubtless think this mere laziness on my part; I call it rather the birth of a new cultural form, the po/mo review:

—Everybody's in striped pants, top hats, cutaways, like pallbearers

—A woman (the Queen?) walks and walks in a circle drawn on the floor

—Old Gaunt [Earle Hyman] clear and noble in diction in the Polonius-like musings on England and on exile

—Andre Braugher [Angelo in *Measure for Measure* in the Park last summer] as Bolingbroke, Henry IV to be, is sharp and bright, but strait-jacketed by the impertinent idiocies of Berkoff

—The Queen gives a tea party with lengthy pourings-out of imaginary tea from a real pot into real cups, whilst in the battle scenes warriors drink from imaginary cups and in the Court Richard and his stooges play imaginary pool with real cues around a rectangle of light. Even a nightmare should have internal logic.

—Michael Stuhlbarg [the Dauphin in Tony Randall's *Saint Joan*] comes to neurotic life with "I had forgot myself, am I not king?/ Awake, thou coward majesty! Thou sleepest./ Is not the King's name twenty thousand names?" But then he's quickly reduced to miming horseback riding.

—A good bit of business at last in the deposition scene. When Richard says, "Here, cousin, seize the crown," he won't let go and Bolingbroke drags Richard around in a great circle, both hanging on desperately to the metal thing. But then Berkoff indulges in imagery from the Christian Passion as Richard kneels for "O that I were a mockery king of snow/ Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke/ To melt myself away in water drops!" and in the looking-glass scene and in the Tower scene, where Richard runs a gauntlet that echoes the Scourging and at the end, with a barefoot Richard in a cell. ("I have been studying how I may compare/ This prison where I live unto the world.") It's phony, insincere, sentimental, unearned; in any case, Richard is not Christ but a prickly, paranoid, poeticizing first sketch for Hamlet.

—As Richard and the Queen take leave, black-clad, umbrella-carrying women out of Seurat walk jerkily about

—Key Bolingbroke scene needed for big-picture coherence cut at end. Good, it means we're out of here.

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The media

Hand-wringing over Whitewater

by James Bowman

Collectively called Whitewater, the loosely connected set of allegations of financial impropriety against President and Mrs. Clinton during their years in Arkansas politics may prove to be the first truly postmodern scandal. Who knows or can even imagine knowing the truth behind it all? But certainly it is an unparalleled illustration of the contemporary truism that a story which appears with any degree of frequency in the news media eventually becomes a story *about* the news media. Where Watergate took more than a year and a presidential resignation to metamorphose from a tale of political wrongdoing into one of journalistic heroism, the flow of Whitewater slowed and diffused into the stagnant swamps of journalistic partisanship and self-doubt in less than three months.

Even as the press was peering most intently into the Clintons' behavior in the past, it had one eye trained on its own in the present. There was, of course, the tabloid war between the *New York Post* and the *Daily News* over investigations into the case of Vincent Foster. The *Post* darkly hinted that Foster's death had not been all that it at first appeared to be—they began referring to his "suicide" in scare quotes—and that, therefore, tangentially related Whitewater matters might also be much less innocent than they looked; the *Daily News* scoffed that Foster's death was an open-and-shut case. Meanwhile, *The Washington Times*, which led the way in investigating skulduggery at the Madison Savings and Loan and the Rose Law Firm, was tweaking the mighty *Washington Post*, which agonized over the propriety of its own coverage and was accused of ignoring or even killing the biggest stories.

In particular, it was rumored that the *Post* had suspended a reporter, Michael Isikoff, for complaining about the suppression of his story on the allegations of Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, that Mr. Clinton had made indecent advances to her in May of 1991. This was not, strictly speaking, a Whitewater story, but the treatment of it not only by the *Post* but by the rest of the media was indicative of the extent to which most journalists and editors were in sympathy with Clinton and inclined to go easy on him where possible. "When allegations are made in public," said the *Post*'s executive editor, Leonard Downie, Jr., "we like to check into them ourselves before printing them, to see what's true or not true. We think we owe our readers that." Such gingerly treatment of Mrs. Jones, who may yet file a civil suit against Clinton, was in sharp contrast to the enthusiasm with which Anita Hill's less well-supported (and less serious) accusations against Clarence Thomas were made into a *cause célèbre*. Nobody was waiting for an air-tight story then.

Of course the answer to that one is that everyone else was doing it. Thus do the mysteries of the pack mentality drape without quite disguising press partisanship. For the true picture, one had only to look at the

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convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 13. There, in reply to a single question on Whitewater, Clinton said: "I have been as candid and as forthright as possible, but can I answer every question that anybody might ever ask me about something that happened ten, fifteen, seventeen years ago on the spur of the moment and have total recall of all of that while trying to be President? No sir, I cannot." Whereupon the editors, or a significant number of them, burst into applause. Imagine the serried ranks of the adversarial press cheering Ronald Reagan for saying that he couldn't remember!

But the Clintons are likely to care less about such partisan support for its own sake than they do about the fact that any discussion of it, pro or con, takes the focus off them and their supposed wrongdoing. Who could have cared, for instance, that *Time* magazine put a five-month-old photograph on its Whitewater cover? They wanted Clinton looking grim and harried, but the more punctilious journalistic moralists protested that it was a gross deception on the public if he had not been grim and harried about Whitewater at the time the photo was taken. *Newsweek* had to apologize for mistakenly quoting a professor at Columbia as having said that Mrs. Clinton had put up no money when she made $99,000 in the cattle futures market in 1978–79. The resulting furor helped to lessen the impact of the news that she had put up only $1,000.

To be sure, there were grounds for criticism of the press. There generally are. What Suzanne Garment, author of *Scandal: The Culture of Mistrust in American Politics*, calls "momentum-building stories"—which offer nothing new but attempt to keep people reading and watching and following the story—were not unknown. But Mrs. Garment was guessing by the first week of April that "they"—that is, the Clintons—"have come through it." At least, she said, "we are in a lull; everybody has said everything." Around the same time, the *New York Times* editorial page, which behaved much more honorably in pursuing the story than I for one would have expected, claimed that we were in "the backlash phase" of the scandal and urged investigators not to flag or be discouraged in their efforts. Across the gutter on the same paper's op-ed page, Frank Rich was making bad puns and hardly containing the relieved good humor with which he was greeting his own discouragement.

Truth to tell, the Clintons had had a pretty easy time of it even when the scandal was at its height, in the first three weeks of March. During that period, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington, where they profess to measure such things scientifically, Whitewater received only about a third as much attention from the network news as Watergate or Iran-Contra. Moreover, slightly more than 60 percent of the network-news sound bites about Bill Clinton and 55 percent of those about Hillary Clinton during this period were favorable. John Sheehan of the CMPA told *The Washington Times* that "the amazing thing is that with all of the hubbub and the numbers of stories we seem to be seeing, the coverage comes out more positive than before Whitewater began." Meanwhile, those who criticized the President were themselves portrayed unfavorably 76 percent of the time.

But the most striking finding of the survey was that the media itself was portrayed negatively 100 percent of the time. This is not a misprint. Accordingly, it was easy to hear the sounds of moaning and whimpering from conscience-stricken reporters deploring their colleagues' excesses of investigative zeal. To them the poor Clintons seemed the victims of a journalistic pogrom. Richard Harwood in *The Washington Post* moaned that "our [i.e. the press's] credibility seemed to be sinking fast" as some of the many allegations against the President and First Lady proved to be less convincing than others and as public opinion seemed to be registering impatience with the amount of time and attention being given to the scandals. That a crowd of "Democratic partisans and political junkies" had taken out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* decrying al-

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legations published in the press against the Clintons or that *Newsweek* had had to confess that it had misquoted the Columbia professor or that William Safire had written a column purporting to be in Mrs. Clinton's voice when he had no obvious qualifications as a mind-reader seemed to Harwood *prima facie* evidence that the press had overblown the story and that it was time to "cool it."

The truth is, however, that such voices urging restraint were heard in the self-regarding press right the way through the most heated period of Whitewater coverage. At the height of March's media fever, Harwood's colleague at the *Post*, Howard Kurtz, trundled out some weighty words of caution from the likes of Walter Cronkite and Marvin Kalb and Paul Begala to the effect "that the coverage has been excessive." Kurtz gave voice to a common trope of the Clinton supporters by suggesting that the intense interest of the press was the result of "a series of blunders that made it appear that the President and Hillary Rodham Clinton had something to hide." It didn't occur to him that the appearance of "something to hide" could have betokened a guilty consciousness that there really *was* something to hide. His half-hearted apology for the press essayed the view that the whole thing had been a misunderstanding.

If the Clintons came unsullied out of this version of the story, they were victims and heroes in the more obviously partisan version. And their journalistic defenders were able to join them in victimhood. Especially delicious was Eleanor Clift's deploring the media culture: "There's no penalty for an individual reporter who is perceived as being too tough," she told Kurtz. "But the reporter who is perceived as being soft is immediately delegitimized, portrayed as being in the tank." I'm not quite sure where a reporter thought to be "in the tank" (as opposed to tanked up) would actually be, but it is clearly some place that Ms. Clift finds disagreeable and very unfair of people to place her. This, mind you, is the woman who, when she interviewed Hillary Clinton for *Newsweek*, asked only one hard question—why hadn't she been more forthcoming about Whitewater?—and then answered it herself by saying: "My theory is that you have a thing about privacy." "A big thing," Mrs. Clinton, not surprisingly, agreed.

Clearly in the same league with Ms. Clift as a champion of the Clintons is Sidney Blumenthal of *The New Yorker*, who anticipated her defense as well as Kurtz's way back in January by writing that it was the Clintons' "stubborn insistence on privacy" that had aroused the press's interest and who confidently predicted that "once a counsel is appointed, the media hemorrhage will be stanched." Yet when he was attacked by William Powers of *The Washington Post* as a slavish supporter of Bill Clinton, Blumenthal professed himself surprised and hurt by the imputation. "I think I'm being quite dispassionate . . . My views are utterly independent," he said on the "Charlie Rose" show. Likewise, Michael Kinsley complains: "I get abuse for being a Clinton cheerleader all the time. All the peer pressure is to whack the guy. All the social pressure is to be critical. There's no reinforcement or reward for sticking up for Clinton. All you get is ridicule." Brave Michael! Standing up to all that pressure and ridicule!

Such obvious advocacy on the part of journalists is now common, if it is not yet the rule. But it would be unfair not to recognize that many of them are genuinely and tragically torn between their sacred duty as journalists to dig as deeply as possible into the political dirt and their loyalty as progressive-minded people to the man who Mickey Kaus, writing in *The New Republic*, called "the best president we've had in a long time." Kaus's point was to acknowledge that allegations of sexual misbehavior against Clinton were not being pursued with the same enthusiasm or single-mindedness that would have appeared in any similar investigation of a Republican. With his tongue, perhaps, ever so lightly tucked into his cheek, he explained that it was not hypocrisy or partisanship which extended to the President the benefit of so many doubts

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but patriotism, the press's "dirty little secret."

This is a charming conceit and one in which there is no doubt much truth relevant to Whitewater, but it should not be allowed to obscure the importance either of Mr. Clinton's own political skills or of the internal dynamics of the postmodern scandal. It may be that all such scandals will prove to be of the Whitewater type—that is, self-extinguishing. Once the temperature reaches a certain level the sprinkler system of irony and self-regard is turned on and the interest of the press in the ostensible cause of it all finally goes out. But even if this is a general rule for scandals henceforth, it is necessary also to take account of the peculiar relationship established between Bill Clinton and the press almost from the time of his appearance on "60 Minutes" in January of 1992 to deny Gennifer Flowers's allegations.

One Clinton partisan with a good point to make was Professor Arthur Schlesinger, who asked in *The Wall Street Journal* if there had ever been "a previous instance in American history when congressional committees and special prosecutors were mobilized to investigate a president's pre-presidential career?" Not counting the October surprise, Ed Meese, Raymond Donovan, or Bert Lance investigations, I suppose he means. But one possible answer to his question of what the "Southern courthouse politics of a familiar sort" involved in Whitewater "have to do with the Clinton presidency a decade later" is that both the press corps and significant sections of the public feel highly ambivalent about Clinton. Periods of doubt that they let him off too easily for his transparent evasions during the campaign and an uneasy sense that he is being held to different standards than his predecessors alternate with whisperings of the progressive conscience noticed by Mickey Kaus.

The on-again, off-again character of the press's interest in the scandal, like Clinton's roller-coaster ride in the polls over the past year and a half, is thus the product of a recurrent fit of anxiety among those who naturally sympathize with the President that maybe they have been fooled. Maybe, indeed, the glib promise of "change" is itself a cover not only for the most familiar sorts of Southern courthouse politics but also for unscrupulous ambition. On the whole, however, it seems to be the aim of the press, at least, to settle down to the notion that the man is a lovable rogue who may or may not be a good President but is always good copy. The respectable, strait-laced, country-club, *Reader's Digest* types in the Republican Party are anathema to the tellers of political tales, and their distaste for Republican blandness is as often as not what lies behind the frequently heard strictures against the "greed" of the Republican 1980s.

The toning-down of that kind of rhetoric may turn out to be the one lasting consequence of the Whitewater scandal. Even if no impeachment, no resignation, no indictments, no civil suits, and no more jokes by David Letterman or Jay Leno come out of the thing, most people will agree with Mrs. Garment that we "don't need to hear any more of Hillary's talk of 'greed.'" And even if nothing comes of the suggestion by David Brandon in *The Wall Street Journal* that Mrs. Clinton's extraordinary luck in the cattle futures market could be explained as the result of a "straddle"—in which a partner wishing to slip her some money under the table could set up two accounts, bet both ways, and put all the gains in her account, all the losses in his own—it may be some time before we have to listen to smug and self-righteous lectures on "the politics of meaning." Likewise, although the press will go on being sympathetic to the Clintons, as they were in the easy questions they asked the President in the news conference of March 24—which appears to be what put a stop to the momentum of the scandal—they may not be quite so ready to accept them at their own valuation as uniquely caring and compassionate politicians.

Interestingly, one of the most piquant commentaries on the press coverage of Whitewater was provided by Professor Stephen Gillers of New York University, the

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very same "widely respected national expert on legal ethics" whom Clinton cited in his press conference as independent authority for the view that Mrs. Clinton had had "a bum rap." Writing in *The Nation*, Gillers took a deconstructionist line on the scandal, which he saw not as a problem in legal ethics but as an affair of competing texts. The Clintons' lack of openness about the affair, he said, had created a vacuum into which the press's need for a good story had rushed. As a result, the Whitewater story as told to the public was likely to focus on the irony of the hammer of "greed" and the friend of the poor finding that his sordid past as a wheeler-dealer in Arkansas was catching up with him.

Gillers saw the famous press conference at which his own views on legal ethics were featured so prominently as an attempt by Clinton "to reclaim the narrator's role" and make the story instead one of a cynical Republican effort to use fabricated charges of personal wrongdoing to prevent much-needed reforms, including taxing the rich and helping the poor. Just after the press conference, he confessed himself "afraid" that Clinton had left it too late for this version to prevail over the others in the field, but as time went on, his pessimism has come to seem less and less justified. The press's self-disgust ultimately overwhelmed even its need for a good story. And in the story of what became of the self-congratulatory journalistic spirit of Watergate will be found what became of Whitewater.

Indeed, the biggest story to come out of the whole affair may turn out to be the press's acceptance of a further and perhaps fatal derogation from its sense of its own importance and dignity. Not only was it in some cases indulging in open partisanship with scarcely a pretense of objectivity, not only was it abetting in the destruction of a common language of public discourse and a shared sense of political honor, but it was also lending itself to such a ghastly mockery of the journalistic enterprise as the "ABC News Special" called "President Clinton Answering Children's Questions," which ran on March 19, at the height of Whitewater fever. In fact, in retrospect it begins to look as if it was this appearance by the President which turned things around rather than the press conference five days later.

Zlata Filipović, "the Anne Frank of Bosnia," was there: a celebrity for the children to rival even Clinton and the personable but respectful Peter Jennings. But she only asked what nearly everybody else asked, which was what reassurance could Clinton give them that bad and scary things would go away. One child asked, "Do you like to be known as the president of the health-care program?" and Jennings chuckled that it "sounds like a set-up." But of course it *was* a set-up, since he was obviously prompting rehearsed questions of which he had had advance notice throughout the hour and a half of the session. It was a bit difficult to imagine this man giving the skeptical inquirer's treatment to the President's news conference on the following Thursday evening when on Saturday morning he had been asking him, "I bet people send you ties every day of the year, don't they?" or exclaiming "What a nice idea!" to a child's proposal to parents to end juvenile crime by telling their children they love them.

We need to accept that it is the Saturday-morning Peter Jennings who is the more genuine and who is carrying out the post-modern media's true functions. The questioning by the children as a group could scarcely be said to have been any easier than that by the press corps five days later, and in one case—that of a boy from Colorado who worried that increases in federal grazing fees would put his family's farm out of business—it was harder. Neither was there any significant difference in the quality or the style of the President's replies or the degree of engagement with difficult issues on the two occasions. It must have seemed to Jennings that acting as impresario for an act of political theater is much more natural for a journalist today—as it is coming to be more often expected of him—than careful probing of the disputed borders between fact and assertion.

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I am by no means convinced that this is altogether a bad thing. Anything that exposes the press's exalted sense of its own importance as the sham it has always been is a good thing. And one must suppose that serious inquirers will find other means than "the media" as presently constituted to satisfy their curiosity and augment their understanding. One hopeful development along these lines is a new half-hour show on PBS called "Think Tank," moderated by Ben Wattenberg, which takes as its unexceptionable premise that public debates between journalists or politicians have become so uniformly unenlightening that it might be an idea to prise some real but relatively shy experts out of their hiding places in universities and think tanks and let them debate one another on the public airwaves.

Judging by the first two installments, on crime and welfare reform, the show is too short and has a tendency, like all television, to degenerate into sound bites. But although the producers have taken some pains to represent a range of opinion—from Robert Bork to Lani Guinier on crime, for example—the most remarkable thing about this inherently theatrical exercise is how little meretricious drama and how much general agreement between the antagonists there is. When Roger Wilkins and Charles Murray find themselves saying similar things about welfare, one begins to think, if only for a moment, that the partisanship of the press may not forever poison and corrupt public discourse; and when Glenn Loury is not shouted down for saying that the solution to the problems of welfare dependency and illegitimacy is simple, it is the will and the nerve that we lack, even the air of political pessimism comes tinged with the hopeful scent of honesty and truth.

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Books

The professor & the poetess

by Brooke Allen

We know by now what we can expect from a Kingsley Amis novel. Skillful, acidic characterization. A skirmish in the war between the sexes, always from the male point of view. Foolery at the expense of trendy politics and argot. At least one character whose overriding awfulness steals the show. Conservative outlook, politically and culturally. Taut, loaded dialogue. Low farce.

Now seventy-two, Amis has completed his twenty-first novel, *The Russian Girl*.[1] Are there any surprises? Not many. Any disappointments? Again, not many. If Amis is anything he's a pro, and *The Russian Girl* is well up to standard in terms of readability, funniness, malevolence. Like a lot of his previous books, however (though not like the better ones, such as *Jake's Thing* and *The Green Man*), it finally slips too easily into facile solutions to be fully satisfactory.

Richard Vaisey is in his mid-forties, a scholar and professor of Russian literature at the London Institute of Slavonic Studies. He is a natural academic, enthralled by his subject (the Russian novel) and indifferent to the world at large. He likes sex but it doesn't loom large in his life.

> His idea of a perfect day was a couple of lectures and a seminar in the morning, a fuck in the afternoon followed by a catching-up on linguistic studies, a solitary dinner with a learned journal by his plate and . . . half an hour on Lermontov before retiring. Everything else was just filling in round that.

Most academics of Richard's type have to be content with a pretty meager portion of life's luxuries, but Richard has worked things out to his advantage. He is quick to deny any imputations that when he married, about ten years previously, it was for money; but it is assuredly for money that he has stayed married. For Cordelia Vaisey is dreadful enough to deserve a prominent place in Amis's chamber of horrors.

It's not just her affected accent (she pronounces her own name "Nggornndelia") or her fey turn of speech ("if Cordelia's phonetic system had been normal she would have stood revealed as one of those who talk of poytry"). It's her entire, dreadful self. With too much money and too little to do, Cordelia rules her husband, her house, and an assortment of women friends who masochistically toe her line, atremble with resentment. Amis dangles before us the possibility of pathos—Cordelia is, after all, a middle-aged woman in a loveless, childless marriage—but always abruptly grabs it back, revealing his creature as a pathological egotist. Does he go over the top a bit, with Cordelia? Of course he does. But this is after all one of the reasons we keep reading Amis: to see just how nasty he can be about his really nasty characters.

1 *The Russian Girl*, by Kingsley Amis; Viking, 296 pages, $22.95.

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For the price of tolerating Cordelia, Richard is allowed a lot of money and a lot of liberty. He is free of middle-class anxieties and indignities. He eats and drinks extremely well. He tools around town in a Viotti TBD instead of having to take the bus or tube. On the rare occasion when he does have to rely on public transport, or a public telephone, he finds that he's forgotten how. All in all he is satisfied with the arrangement until the predictable happens and this male Sleeping Beauty wakes from his trance. He falls in love.

The awakener is Anna Danilova, perhaps the last in the twentieth-century tradition of Russian dissidents. She has recently arrived in England and cashed in on her modest reputation as a poet in order to garner support for her effort to spring her brother from the prison in which he is being illegally held. Richard, charmed and seduced, enthusiastically offers his support. But he soon discovers that it's rather a doubtful venture. First of all, the brother is not a political prisoner but an actual criminal, his continued incarceration by the Gorbachev regime at most "a rather regrettable blunder in some local court or prison over there." Then there is the question of Anna's poetic achievements. A single example (in translation, of course) is enough to let us judge just how good a poet she is. From "me in lingerie":

> seductive is what you wanna be said the other girls,
> hows that i asked oh cmon chrissake i only wanna know.
> well says the crosseyed one supposed to blow like a grampus
> what ever the fuck a grampus is, well she says
> seductive thats kinda fuckish see like madonna
> or samantha fox and if you wanna make fuckish
> get your ass into some lingerie & smell good.

How can Richard love a woman whose mind is capable of such drivel? In good conscience he can't even wish her success, for "such a success would, in a sense beyond all personal considerations, be a victory for something hostile to what he thought was valuable. It would encourage the notion that there could be a sphere of meaning beyond language." Nevertheless he does love her, responding to the warmth, companionship, and humor he didn't even know he missed. He cravenly avoids giving Anna his opinion of her poetry. He also tries to avoid the fact that he will have to decide whether to affix his signature to a petition on behalf of Anna's brother, a document that claims Anna to be one of the leading poets of her generation.

Like other of Amis's books, *The Russian Girl* is a problem novel: its hero must make a crucial decision. Will he or won't he sign the petition? If he refuses, he keeps his critical integrity but almost certainly loses Anna. If he signs, he may get to keep Anna, but will lose his professional self-respect, which, Richard understands, is all a man in his position ever really has. And if he does by some miracle get to keep Anna, what about Cordelia? Extricating oneself from her, a previous husband warns him, is like taking off Nessus's shirt, "incorporating a jockstrap lined with super-glue." And, of course, he'll miss the money.

Richard ponders his problem in a series of tête-à-têtes: with his best friend Crispin Radetsky, a super-rich, opportunistic businessman; with his colleague Tristram Hallett, an old-style scholar; with Andrei Kotolynov, the *éminence grise* of Russian dissidents, now a wholly Americanized fellow who says "Have a nice day" and writes Bond-style thrillers under an assumed name. Kotolynov is just a little too obviously Amis's own stand-in. He refuses to sign the petition on the grounds that literature should never be subordinated to politics. "Everywhere in the world," he says, "literature is in retreat from politics and unless resisted the one will crush the other. You don't crush literature from outside by killing writers or intimidating them or not letting

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them publish. . . . You do better to induce them to destroy it themselves by inducing them to subordinate it to political purposes, as you propose to do."

After a few tricky feints on Amis's part, Richard finally makes his decision. It would be unfair to tell what he decides, but fair enough to reveal that for Richard, the story has an unexpectedly happy ending. It's a device Amis has used before, notably in his first novel, *Lucky Jim*, but while in *Lucky Jim* the ending is organic and right, here it seems contrived, too easy. For Jim Dixon was an impetuous, even romantic young man, but Richard Vaisey is a cautious middle-aged one, well aware of the value of privacy and comfort and of love's mutability.

Amis makes *The Russian Girl*'s characters colorful, but ultimately he fails to make them real. Kotolynov, for all his idiosyncrasies, is merely a vehicle for opinions against political art, and other characters—Crispin, Hallett, even Richard—similarly exist too transparently as mouthpieces for particular positions to take on any reality as living people. The luscious Anna, especially, fails to come alive, perhaps because, since she speaks only in Russian, her dialogue has to be rendered as translated idiom.

The paradox is that in writing a novel against the politicization of art, Amis has himself written what can only be deemed a political novel. Character and plot are subordinated to the central argument. In this, Amis is as guilty as the American novelists he criticizes, novelists who adulterate fiction by writing about "fascism and racism and male chauvinism and homosexuality . . . and Hollywood and consumerism," or writers in Russia, "the one place in the world where literature has died by its own hand."

Yet even second-string Amis is always worth reading, and there are certain things he does better than anyone now writing. Who could match, for instance, his malicious skill at pointing out all the little dramas and performances we constantly act out for the benefit of others?

> Sir Stephen had started smiling and crinkling his face in a way that obviously meant he had something rather special of his own to contribute, and not much later this had to be allowed out. But first his demeanor turned abruptly and totally grim, as if at an intimation of a death in the family, for as long as it took to satisfy himself that nobody needed any refreshment. This established, he turned jovial again . . .

Amis has been doing this kind of thing superbly since his first novel, and his powers have not diminished. Even more valuable is his unapologetic presentation of the male point of view. No comic writer since Thurber has more brilliantly captured the psyche of modern Anglo-American manhood: furtive, pusillanimous, passive-aggressive, always side-stepping the predatory female, Amis's men form a national brotherhood. They feel themselves to be persecuted, but they give as good as they get, retaliating with a full retreat from all communication. The hero of *The Green Man* would rather watch television than try to straighten out his marriage; Richard Vaisey escapes both wife and mistress to pore over his Lermontov notes. When they are finally forced to discuss personal relations, the men wallow in their own lack of insight. Here Richard talks with Cordelia's first husband:

> "What did you marry her for, Godfrey?"
>
> "Oh dear. Well, she was quite pretty, and things like that. I expect you found the same, didn't you?"
>
> "Yes, but there must have been other stuff we've forgotten. Surely."
>
> "No way of knowing, is there?"

It is Amis's cruel realization of the self-serving little hypocrisies we all indulge in that sets him above so many other writers. This is what makes even a novel like *The Russian Girl*, which fails in its larger ambitions, nevertheless a valuable piece of work and a pleasure to read. Amis is still one of the meanest and funniest writers around.

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Flaubert's muse

Francine du Plessix Gray
Rage and Fire: A Life of Louise Colet.
Simon & Schuster, 432 pages, $27.50

reviewed by Renee Winegarten

Familiar to admirers of Gustave Flaubert as the writer with whom he had a tempestuous affair, Louise Colet has not—until fairly recently—enjoyed a good press. Yet it was to her that Flaubert addressed the now celebrated letters on his art that make the genesis of *Madame Bovary* one of the best-charted in fiction. Fifty years ago, one leading Flaubert scholar could just bring himself to say of this poet and woman of letters that a novel of hers was "not without talent" and that she herself was "not without genuine grievances." However, the wave of feminism since the 1970s has swept Louise Colet, known variously to her contemporaries as "the Muse," "Penserosa," "Sappho," along with it. Julian Barnes had her argue her own case persuasively in a chapter of his amusing *Flaubert's Parrot*. There have been at least two French biographies of this independent spirit (one by Micheline Bood and Serge Grand, the other by Jean-Paul Clébert) in the last decade. Now a fluent American biography, by Francine du Plessix Gray, is to be welcomed.

Born in Provence in 1810, Louise Révoil was famously endowed with a "southern" temperament, i.e., she was passionate and impetuous. She belonged with the generation of French high Romanticism, with its literature of personal confession and its generous humanitarian sympathies. Studious, ambitious, and totally without means, she married Hippolyte Colet, an equally impecunious (and as it turned out, unsuccessful) musician. By early 1835 they were settled in Paris, her aim being to take the capital by storm. One element in her favor: she was extremely beautiful (and knew it). Still, life was hard, as she made the rounds of indifferent or gross editors, or utilized tenuous contacts forged by unsolicited visits to the great in order to establish her name. A few noncommittal phrases in a reply from the lofty novelist and statesman François-René de Chateaubriand served as the preface to her first collection of verses. A poem on a theme set by the Académie Française carried off the prize and its monetary reward (she was to win the competition four times in all, a considerable feat).

The eminent eclectic philosopher and liberal politician Victor Cousin ("Plato") fell in love with her and became her protector, the leading light of her literary and political salon, and—along with Hippolyte Colet—the putative father of her daughter, Henriette. Louise and her husband would go their separate ways until his death in 1851.

Wags had it that Cousin had maneuvered her first success with the Académie Française, though her new biographer shows that this was not the case. All the same, Louise Colet acquired the reputation for being pushy and on the make. Yet she needed money to live: she was an early professional woman writer, following in the wake of George Sand (*née* Aurore Dupin), who had begun her Parisian journalistic career in 1831. The satirist Alphonse Karr published a scabrous allusion to Louise Colet's liaison with Victor Cousin. Though pregnant with Henriette, she rushed to Karr's home to take revenge by stabbing him (to little effect) with her kitchen knife, "in the back" as he liked jokingly to maintain. This act of folly would never be forgotten.

By 1846, the year Flaubert met the ravishing Louise Colet in the studio of James Pradier ("Phidias"), where she was posing for the well-known sculptor, she was an established "femme artiste"—that is, a woman writer living a free life like George Sand or Hortense Allart and (as she would insist) not to be confused with a courtesan or a kept woman. She would not be setting up house with any of her numerous literary or political lovers: obscure Polish patriots, radical députés, famous poets such as Alfred de Musset and Alfred de Vigny. The kind of artistic Bohemia she inhabited was distinct

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from that lowlier version described by Henri Murger (and popularized by Puccini). Flaubert had been advised by Pradier to take a mistress. Tall, good-looking, some eleven years younger than Louise Colet, a native of Normandy and therefore cautious where she was rash, Flaubert had so far published nothing. She would read his manuscripts and, unlike his friend Maxime du Camp, she recognized his genius long before the world did so.

Their relationship, which falls into two parts, 1846–48 and 1851–54, with a conclusive break in 1855, has been portrayed as Flaubert's one serious love affair. Sartre (in an interview in 1979 in *L'Arc*) would have none of this: all he would concede was that Flaubert "must have rather enjoyed making love to Louise for a short while, but that is all. He greatly preferred writing letters." From the beginning Flaubert lucidly foresaw the end. True, he swore an oath to be devoted to Louise and her daughter for life—but then, he would not keep it. Rendezvous with Louise in Paris or Mantes were rare once he had his masturbatory souvenirs: the bloodstained handkerchief, the silk slippers that would finally go on the fire with her letters at the end of his life, in the hours of destruction he spent with Maupassant. The present feminist biographer sees this conflagration as yet another typical dastardly act against womankind, although there is scarcely a writer of repute whose literary remains have not suffered some degree of mutilation—see Ian Hamilton's entertaining *Keepers of the Flame*.

On the male bonding, homoeroticism, and attraction to prostitutes shared by Flaubert and the friends of his youth in Rouen, Francine du Plessix Gray happily does not mince words. Doubtless the same tendencies can also be found in considerable detail in the recreational activities of Stendhal, Prosper Mérimée, and Alfred de Musset (who would behave caddishly to Louise). The best one can say about the attitude of these literary lights toward women is that it was thoroughly confused. A woman with any claims to intellect was "masculine"—at once a compliment and a drawback—in a feminine body: she was hermaphrodite. Louise Colet would not accept Flaubert's nonsense on this theme, the separation of woman from writer, or flesh from spirit.

For a biographer who adopts a strong feminist stance, though, Francine du Plessix Gray strangely speaks of women who used their minds in study as "bluestockings," counting oddly among their number in the seventeenth century the Duchesse de Chevreuse, that active conspirator during the civil wars of the Fronde. The term "bluestocking," applied in England in the eighteenth century to a particular circle of literary and learned women, became current in France as "bas-bleu" in the early nineteenth century. It was used pejoratively, with condescension and even ridicule, to mean "pedantic," and still carries that pejorative meaning today. Not until more than half way through her book does the author note parenthetically that the word "bluestocking" was an insult in nineteenth-century France. Indeed, Flaubert once told Louise Colet that titles to her poems "smack of the bluestocking, and you aren't one, thank God." That must have been a comfort.

It is a pity that some of the background material in this readable biography looks careless. On the French Revolution, for instance, Manon Roland, guillotined in November 1793, could scarcely have been condemned "on the orders" of Marat, assassinated by Charlotte Corday in July 1793. Inaccurate, too, are certain references to Germaine de Staël, here weirdly called the "den mother of the Romantics," who was deeply admired by Louise Colet for her liberal views and outspoken active opposition to Napoleon Bonaparte. Mme de Staël did not remain on her estate at Coppet during most of the Emperor's reign (as the author erroneously informs us). On the contrary, on numerous occasions she traveled across Europe, once even as far as Russia at the time of the French invasion, striving for the tyrant's overthrow. Moreover,

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Mme de Staël is said to have been "erotically active" in her sixties, although she died at fifty-one. She was not the only model for Ellénore in the subtle psychological novel, *Adolphe*, written by her onetime lover Benjamin Constant: there are at least four women on whom that unfortunate heroine is thought to be based. We are told that Chateaubriand and his inamorata, Mme Récamier, Louise Colet's friend, "first met at Mme de Staël's deathbed." According to Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, they were reunited "at the time of Mme de Staël's death" in 1817, having met in 1805 and again in 1814.

Admirers of George Sand throughout the world, of whom there are now a great many, will scarcely read the references to the author of *Lélia* without dismay. We are told of her "first marriage"—in fact her only marriage. Her husband is described with little historical tact as "gun-toting" (he was fond of hunting and once threatened her by making for his gun). Comments on her early lifestyle might have been written before the modern revaluation of George Sand and her works. She "cranked out" her books—this is said of one of the most imaginative, innovative, and influential writers of the nineteenth century.

On their rare encounters, Louise Colet may have tired Flaubert with her tears and recriminations, but he did not treat her well. He broke in a coldly cutting way with a woman who had been generous to him and to his friend Louis Bouilhet. Even his mother, whom he used as a pretext for denying Louise Colet entry into his home at Croisset, thought that he had treated his mistress badly and in a manner insulting to her sex. Mme Flaubert said that his passion for words had "dried up" his heart.

Perhaps Flaubert had purposely renewed relations with Louise Colet in 1851, just as he was beginning *Madame Bovary*, in order to pick her brains for his deluded heroine. (Ms. Gray is sure of this.) He asked Louise for precise details for Emma Bovary's dreams as a young girl. The romanticism with which he endowed Emma was that of his own youth, however, as well as being Louise Colet's enduring outlook on life. Although Flaubert insisted that the novel must be impersonal, thus standing in direct opposition to the despised confessional literature of Louise Colet, Alfred de Musset, *et al.*, he also said "Madame Bovary, c'est moi."

Despite his views on impersonality, then, Flaubert was not above using the impoverished Louise's gift of a seal, inscribed with the words *Amor nel cor*, by having Emma Bovary give her lover Rodolphe an identical seal with the same inscription. Cynically, Rodolphe seals with *Amor nel cor* the letter where he breaks with Emma after forming a teardrop with water from a glass. Nor was Flaubert above using the hackney carriage in which he and Louise had their early moving amorous encounter, and transferring it to Emma and Léon in the grotesque register in his novel. Years later he told the Goncourt brothers—who thought him coarse—that while with Louise he had put his head out of the carriage window to conceal his laughter. But then, as most people knew, Flaubert (who had his tender moments) was prone to exaggeration.

Neither party was a model of fidelity, but despite the string of her later lovers, Louise Colet could not forget Flaubert. His years of fame began with *Madame Bovary*, after he had dismissed her. She took her puny revenge in two novels, *Une Histoire de soldat* (1856) and the hugely successful *Lui* (1859). Even when she visited Egypt in 1869 as a journalist for the opening of the Suez Canal, she was haunted by the image of Kuschiuk Hanem, the courtesan who had so entranced Flaubert on the Nile years before. Flaubert did not entirely forget the Muse either, since he gave his heroine Salammbô the pose of Pradier's second statue of Louise Colet as Sappho, seated with her hands folded around her knee.

Much remains to be written about Louise Colet and politics. She was a progressive liberal in the European sense before her liaison with Victor Cousin. In her youth, she claimed, she had read all the works of Ben-

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jamin Constant, in whose political writings she had found "an ardent defender of freedom" and "an enemy of fanaticism." Mme Récamier entrusted the Muse with a copy of Constant's intimate letters to herself, to be published after her demise. Their over-hasty publication involved Louise in a costly lawsuit with Mme Récamier's reactionary adopted daughter and heir. Some of the differences between Louise Colet and George Sand were of a political character. There was a Jacobin period (roughly 1836–48) when George Sand could ardently defend Robespierre and the Terror of 1793–94, and when she put all the blame on the Girondins. Louise Colet had favored the Girondins in her writing on the Girondin-inspired Charlotte Corday and on Manon Roland, their "Egeria." Indeed, George Sand would maintain her opposition to liberalism of the kind expressed by Louise Colet and others.

After the coup d'état of December 1851 and the advent of Napoleon III, Louise Colet—following in Mme de Staël's footsteps—proved a consistent opponent of the authoritarian regime of Napoleon's nephew. Her salon, that of a fervent anticlerical republican, was a center of the liberal opposition. She took risks in distributing the writings of Victor Hugo—the most outspoken opponent of Napoleon the Little—who thundered from his island exile. In order to circumvent police surveillance, she had even persuaded Flaubert to join her in serving as one of the intermediaries for the poet's correspondence with his political associates. Moreover, she kept Victor Hugo informed of the state of affairs in France, and visited him on Guernsey.

In her later years—after Mme de Staël's desire for Italian unity—Louise Colet's enthusiasm for the Italian Risorgimento knew no bounds: she had met Mazzini in London; she interviewed Cavour in Milan and Turin; she hastened to join Garibaldi in Naples. There followed the four volumes of *L'Italie des Italiens* (1862–64). A few years before her death, she was in Paris during the Commune of 1871, and so witnessed the horrors of its downfall. With Victor Hugo, she proved to be one of the few writers of note to sympathize with the persecuted defeated insurgents. Flaubert thought they should have been condemned to sweep the streets with chains round their necks like galley slaves.

Francine du Plessix Gray offers a vivid account of Louise Colet's career as one who expressed compassion for the sufferings endured by women, and especially by the humble, peasants and servants. The biographer does not make any high claims for the Muse as a writer. Louise Colet had "good looks, monumental determination, and a modest talent"; her writings were "often sloppy, sometimes powerful." Still, a number of her distinguished contemporaries thought she was a gifted poet, even if some believed that she put pen to paper much too quickly. Flaubert himself, who took the trouble to correct the style of some of her poems, opined that she had a fine sense of comedy which she neglected in favor of sentimental democratic politics. One wonders whether more might be said for her as a writer, and as a political figure whom some of her contemporaries praised for her readiness to take risks, her sympathy with the oppressed, her indignation at injustice.

"The Tenth Justice"

Gerald Gunther Learned Hand:
The Man and the Judge.
Foreword by Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr.
Knopf, 818 pages, $35

reviewed by Marc M. Arkin

If he would be a great lawyer, he must first consent to become a great drudge.
—Daniel Webster

The name of Billings Learned Hand (1872–1961) cast a long shadow over our first year of law school. As a judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit for more than thirty-five years, Hand—along with his more pedestrian cousin,

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Augustus "Gus" N. Hand, and former Yale professor Thomas Swan—had made that court the most respected in the nation. His appointment to the circuit in 1924 followed hard upon fifteen years of distinguished service on the federal trial court bench in Manhattan. Indeed, when Hand's contemporary, Justice Benjamin Cardozo, was asked which of his Supreme Court colleagues was the greatest living American jurist, Cardozo replied, "The greatest living American jurist isn't *on* the Supreme Court." He was, of course, referring to Learned Hand.

In class after class, Learned Hand's opinions appeared as exemplars of legal reasoning, articulating principles that we as yet were barely able to grasp in prose so eloquent—or, for the uncharitable, so orotund—as to reduce all but the most self-assured among us to paroxysms of self-doubt. From the "Learned Hand formula" for the calculation of damages in negligence cases—revived by the present-day "law and economics" movement—to Hand's famous 1917 decision in *Masses Publishing Company v. Patten*—articulating a standard more protective of dissident speech than the "clear-and-present-danger test" of Justice Holmes, a standard that won acceptance by the Supreme Court fifty-two years after Hand enunciated it—Learned Hand was a brooding omnipresence. And, our professors let us know, this was only the tip of the iceberg; Hand's real expertise was in the arcane world of intellectual property, the law of patent and copyright.

He was the ideal to which we were to aspire; the consummate legal craftsman, remote, lofty, Olympian. He was at the center of American legal culture for more than fifty years. He even looked like a judge. And then, somewhere near the end of first year, someone, probably a second-year student, revealed to us the hermetic wisdom of legal practitioners everywhere: "quote Learned but follow Gus." It came as a great relief.

Professor Gerald Gunther's monumental and long-awaited study, *Learned Hand: The Man and the Judge*, is the life of one institution by another. Author of the leading casebook on constitutional law—and, incidentally, a professor of constitutional law at Stanford Law School—Professor Gunther is himself an eminent scholar who has shaped the views of generations of law students. In a 1987 *New York Law Journal* poll among lawyers regarding who, if ability were the sole criterion, would be the best appointment to the Supreme Court, Gerald Gunther was far and away the first choice. In addition, Gunther brings a personal perspective to the book: in 1953, upon graduation from law school, Gunther served as law clerk to Judge Hand. As Justice Lewis Powell states in his gracious foreword to the volume: "Apart from family members, few people ever know a judge quite as well as the law clerk."

The bare details of Hand's life are easily told. Hand—"Learned" to acquaintances and "B" to his intimates—was born in 1872 to an Albany family in which father, two uncles, and paternal grandfather were all lawyers. He attended Harvard College, where he studied with Royce, James, and Santayana. Pressured by his relatives, Hand abandoned this flirtation with philosophy and agreed to follow the family trade, attending Harvard Law School during its early glory years under the stewardship of Christopher Columbus Langdell. It was there, at the feet of the redoubtable James Thayer, that Hand imbibed the legal principles that informed the rest of his long career at the bar and bench with remarkable constancy.

Hand neither enjoyed the practice of law nor was he particularly successful at it. For five years after graduation, he drifted around Albany's legal community, privately expressing dissatisfaction with both his legal and personal prospects. Then, in 1901, he met Frances Fincke, a Bryn Mawr graduate who, if one reads between the lines of Gunther's gentlemanly treatment, was a strong individual with some decidedly prosaic prejudices about others and some decidedly unconventional ideas about herself. The hitherto indecisive Hand fell in love on the spot. A year and a half later, he was married

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and had moved to New York City to try his luck in the more lucrative corridors of Wall Street.

Although Hand's practice never flourished, he became well known in New York's legal and intellectual circles, largely through the well-connected crowd from his Harvard days. He grew active in local progressive politics and in 1909, as a result of these contacts, President Taft appointed the thirty-seven-year-old Hand to the federal trial court. Fifteen years later, in 1924, Calvin Coolidge appointed Hand to the Second Circuit. Twice—once in 1930 and again in 1942—Hand barely missed appointment to the United States Supreme Court. Instead, he lived out his life on the Second Circuit, growing in esteem and influence, reflected in the popular title of "the Tenth Justice."

Gunther points out that, despite his lifelong commitment to restrained and apolitical judging, Hand was publicly active in politics during his early years on the bench. He vigorously supported Theodore Roosevelt's 1912 Progressive–Bull Moose campaign for the presidency, serving as a confidential advisor and helping draft the party platform. A year later, while a sitting judge, he stood as Progressive Party candidate for Chief Judge of New York's Court of Appeals. In 1914, Hand joined Herbert Croly and Walter Lippmann in founding *The New Republic*, attending editorial-board dinners and frequently contributing pieces on topical matters. Only after World War I did he finally conclude that his position on the bench precluded a public stand on controversial issues. Thereafter, with a few exceptions, it was by his judicial works that Hand was known.

Gunther threads his way manfully through Hand's four thousand published opinions, focusing primarily on the cases of interest to a general readership—the due-process and First Amendment decisions—although he is not above treating the reader to an ample dose of copyright and ship-collision cases as well. In fact, Hand heard some of the most famous cases of the first half of the century. As a member of the Second Circuit, he sat on the three-judge panel that struck down congressional efforts to regulate wages and hours in the poultry industry in *United States v. Schechter Poultry* (1935), one of the most important of the early New Deal cases. He was also on the 1934 panel that permitted the introduction of James Joyce's *Ulysses* into the United States, after the book's seizure by the customs service for obscenity. In the Cold War period, it was Hand's 1950 *United States v. Dennis* decision that upheld the constitutionality of the Smith Act and, consequently, the convictions of eleven leaders of the American Communist Party for conspiring to advocate the violent overthrow of the United States government. In the same year, in *United States v. Coplon*, Hand overturned the conviction of an American citizen for stealing and delivering "defense information" to a Soviet agent on the grounds that the authorities had infringed her Fourth Amendment rights.

Hand also continued to be an engaged observer of twentieth-century political life. Possessed of a legendary contempt for the telephone, he corresponded regularly—it seems almost daily—with such friends as Felix Frankfurter, Walter Lippmann, and Bernard Berenson, leaving an insider's record of everything from the petty squabbles accompanying judicial appointments to the election of FDR and the rise of fascism in Europe. Gunther draws extensively upon this voluminous correspondence—he is the first scholar to have access to much of the material—to develop an intellectual history both of Hand and of the East Coast elite that governed the country through World War II. In doing so, he recaptures a lost world in which everyone knew everyone else and it was a grand—and socially dangerous—gesture of liberalism to propose a Jew for a dining club.

Despite his self-imposed retirement from the world of political affairs, Hand retained a taste for the public eye. He remained active in various bar projects and was much in demand as a public speaker, blessing a variety of ceremonial events with his presence.

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In fact, he first entered the popular consciousness with his 1944 "I-Am-an-American Day" speech, delivered two weeks before the allied invasion of Normandy. In it, he offered his famous—if saccharine—definition of "the spirit of liberty":

> I cannot define it; I can only tell you my own faith. The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias; the spirit of liberty remembers that not even a sparrow falls to earth unheeded; the spirit of liberty is the spirit of Him who, near two thousand years ago, taught mankind that lesson it has never learned, but has never quite forgotten; that there may be a kingdom where the least shall be heard and considered side by side with the greatest.

The address was widely reprinted by the popular press—including that *sine qua non* of American boosterism, *Reader's Digest*. Eight years later, in 1952, Hand attained full status as an American icon. *The Spirit of Liberty*, a collection of his extrajudicial essays and addresses, became a surprise best seller.

Hand's judicial philosophy received its most systematic expression, however, in his 1958 Holmes Lectures, "The Bill of Rights," delivered at Harvard Law School when Hand was eighty-seven years old. To understand these lectures—and Hand's views—requires a bit of backtracking. When Hand was a young man, the *bête noire* of political progressives was the Supreme Court's 1905 decision in *Lochner v. New York*, which held unconstitutional a New York law that prohibited the employment of bakery workers for more than ten hours a day or sixty hours a week. The Court found that the law violated due process—the constitutional right to be free from government deprivations of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. In doing so, the Court scrutinized not only the procedures by which the law regulated the bakery owner's property rights—so-called procedural due process—but the substance of the law itself. In essence, the Court told Congress and state legislatures that the judiciary would review any laws that infringed on economic interests with a very jaundiced eye.

Lochner introduced the era of "substantive due process." Courts guided by *Lochner* sat, in Hand's vivid phrase, as a "third legislative chamber." For thirty years, until the New Deal, "Lochnerizing" courts blocked progressive efforts at economic reform. Hand's first substantial article was an attack on the legitimacy of *Lochner*; later on, he actually advocated repeal of the due-process clause. The experience left progressives such as Hand profoundly suspicious of judicial activism. Instead, as a liberal, Hand believed that if a law were within the legitimate reach of legislative action, the courts should uphold its constitutionality, choosing to put his faith in democratic processes. This, incidentally, explains Hand's extreme solicitude toward First Amendment values and his view, expressed in the Holmes Lectures, that—despite their obligations of deference—judges should scrutinize closely any laws that infringe upon the free expression of ideas. (As an aside, Gunther's discussion of substantive due process and what was at stake in progressive opposition to the *Lochner* Court is extraordinarily clear and one of the high points of the book.)

The difficulty began in 1923, at the zenith of *Lochner*'s influence, when the Supreme Court dealt progressives a wild card. The Court invalidated a state law on the ground that it violated due process because it arbitrarily interfered with liberty—as opposed to economic—rights. In *Meyer v. Nebraska*, the Court reversed the conviction of a parochial-school teacher for violating a Minnesota law that prohibited the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools, striking down the law in the process. From then on, liberals looked to substantive due process to protect individual liberties while decrying its appearance in cases involving economic regulation. The final turnabout

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occurred in *Carolene Products*, in which, in the famous Footnote 4, Justice Harlan Fiske Stone promised more careful scrutiny for laws that infringed on "personal," rather than "economic," rights.

Hand would have nothing of such inconsistency. Although he remained moderate and an internationalist in his personal politics, he steadfastly advocated a uniform standard of judicial review. And, in his Holmes Lectures, delivered in the early years of the Warren Court, Hand said as much. He condemned the Court's "opportunistic reversion" to judicial intervention and rejected any suggestion of a legitimate "double standard" justifying judicial activism on behalf of personal rights while deferring to economic regulations. Worse still, he announced to his stunned audience that the recently decided case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was an example of just such judicial abuse. Although Hand admitted that the Court could have held racial equality as an absolute constitutional value that must prevail over any conflicting interest, he concluded that, because the decision focused only on school segregation, *Brown* constituted impermissible second-guessing of legislative choices by the Court. It was as if a dinosaur had unwittingly stumbled into the age of mammals. Although the faithful Gunther first tries to pin the blame for Hand's treatment of *Brown* on Felix Frankfurter and then on the law clerk—Ronald Dworkin—who convinced Hand to talk about *Brown* at all, it appears that the Holmes Lectures simply—and fairly—represent the unwavering consistency of Hand's views from law school until his death. The irony, of course, is that during the Burger and Rehnquist years, liberals have rediscovered the virtues of judicial restraint, while accusing conservatives of advocating judicial activism.

Gunther's admiration for Hand not only influences his evaluation of Hand's character and work, it also frequently leads him to accept the judge's self-estimation at face value. For example, Gunther repeatedly traces

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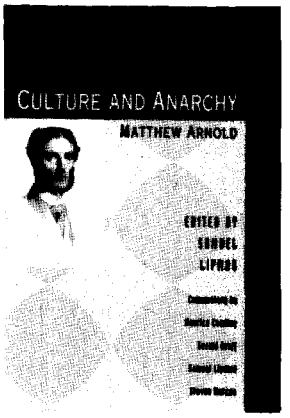

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Hand's political sympathies to his sense of being an outsider. However, it appears that the source of Hand's self-image was his failure to win election to the socially exclusive Porcellian Club while a Harvard undergraduate, a slight that rankled well into old age. An impartial reader might wonder about the type of character that would still be taking the Porcellian seriously at that stage of life. The more interesting question, though, is how someone who was a convivial companion, who moved in socially elite circles of wealth and power, who counted among his friends everyone from Jerome Frank to J. D. Salinger, could continue to view himself as an outsider—and how a biographer could present him as actually being one.

Hand was a complex individual, and Gunther's reverential portrait of the man is probably the least persuasive aspect of the book. I should say, however, that in these days of tell-all biographies, I, for one, appreciated Gunther's old-fashioned discretion regarding the intimate details of Hand's domestic life. Perhaps Gunther's most surprising observation—at least to outsiders—is that Hand was riven with self-doubt all his life, a man whose vacillation led Felix Frankfurter to call him the "modern Hamlet." At the same time, Gunther's efforts to humanize Hand by quoting at length from the strained witticisms of his judicial voting memoranda quickly pall. After all, this is the man that Lewis Powell recalls terrorizing lawyers from the bench and even Gunther describes as reducing law clerks—his "puny judges"—to the verge of tears. Blinkered by affection, Gunther does not really come to grips with the many-faceted personality of his subject.

The book also has some organizational problems. For example, a chapter on "The Second Circuit Court of Appeals in the 1920s and 1930s" is followed by a chapter on "Achieving National Renown During the Nation's Complacent Years, 1919–1928" and another about "The Hoover Years." The result is a fair amount of repetition and some minor infelicities, as when an event—say, the *Ulysses* prosecution—is chronicled at length in one chapter and then described as about to occur in the next. The book also contains extensive digressions—recounting apparently peripheral events such as the Scopes trial—which, depending on the reader's tolerance, would lead one to describe the book as either richly textured or in need of focus. As a final warning, the book is encumbered by a rather inartistic prose style, which may be a bit off-putting to a non-specialist reader of a book of this length.

Nevertheless, these must be counted small complaints given the scope of the work. Gunther has produced a very important and interesting book; it is likely to be the definitive biography of Judge Hand. Perhaps the last word should go to the judge himself, who once summed up the major scholarly work of Felix Frankfurter's career by saying, "What an amazing mine of information it is! How extraordinary that anyone can find the opportunity for such detailed and thorough work!"

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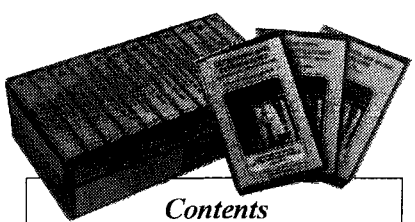

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